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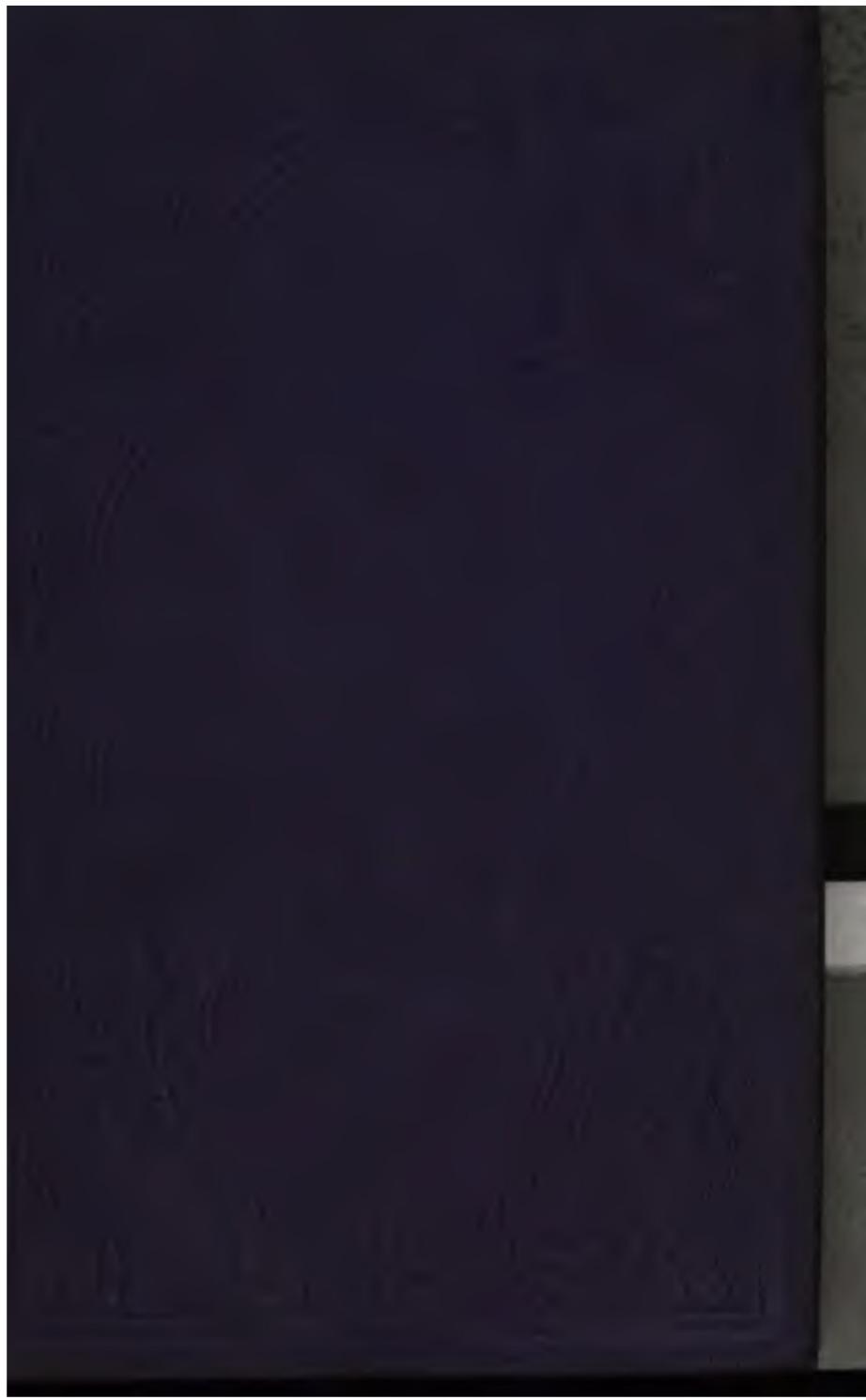
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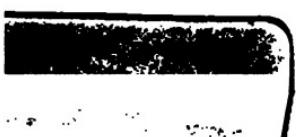
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ONE STORY BY TWO AUTHORS;

OR,

A Tale without a Moral.

(REPRINTED FROM "THE MONTHLY PACKET" WITH ADDITIONS.)

BY J. I.,
AUTHOR OF "A RHYMING CHRONICLE," ETC.,

AND F. M. L.,
AUTHOR OF "GENTLE INFLUENCE," ETC.

"WE, HERMIA, LIKE TWO ARTIFICIAL GODS,
HAVE WITH OUR NEEDLES CREATED BOTH ONE FLOWER."
Midsummer Night's Dream.

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ONE STORY BY TWO AUTHORS;

OR,

A Tale without a Moral.

CHAPTER I.

MARGARET.

“But if alone we be,
Where is our empery?
And if none can reach our stature,
Who can paint our lofty nature?
Drop, leaf—be silent, song,
Cold things we come among;
We must warm them, we must warm them,
Ere we ever hope to charm them.”

E. B. BROWNING.

OME parents send their daughters to school that they may learn accomplishments, and some that they may learn languages; while others give as a reason for parting with their children, that they wish them to learn from the wholesome regularity and discipline of a school life, how to regulate and control their own minds and feelings.

But when Archdeacon Wilton brought his great.

niece to Mrs. Seagrave, he said nothing about languages, accomplishments, or discipline ; his sole and singular remark on the subject was, "I have brought my niece to you, madam, that she may learn to be like other people!"

Archdeacon Wilton was a very old gentleman, of a small and well-made figure. He had exceedingly bright black eyes, and his manner was characterized by that peculiar style of politeness, which we are now pleased to consider old-fashioned. When he had made this one remark, he appeared to think that he had exhausted the subject, for he was silent for some moments, and then began to talk on the beauty of the weather, and the forwardness of the crops.

This niece, Margaret Grant, having bowed to Mrs. Seagrave, stole to a window, and stood looking out, with her back towards her natural and her acquired guardians. Her attitude betrayed great embarrassment ; her dress, which was badly chosen, was far too rich in material, and too decided in colour to become a girl of her age, and was untidily and ungracefully put on. She was as tall as many women, and much the reverse of slender ; but her unformed figure and simple shyness of air, made her look like a magnified child.

"Well, Maggie, dear," said the Archdeacon, rising, "I hope I shall soon hear that you are growing more like other people."

A mighty sob heaved the bosom of Margaret, and she turned round and threw her arms with impulsive vehemence round her uncle's neck.

"Pooh!" he said, gently, and almost tenderly, "I thought I was promised that there should be none of this?" and then he kissed her, and Margaret, disengaging herself suddenly from him, flew back to her place at the window, choked down her

sobs and restrained herself, while he walked leisurely down stairs, praising first the pretty country house, and the flowering plants in stands which cast such a pleasant fragrance around them, and then the pretty garden without, the river flowing through the meadows, and the two round hills beyond, which were covered with yellow buttercups.

In the hall, before kissing his hand to Mrs. Seagrave, he once more confided his great niece to her care, and remarked that his chief desire for her in THIS world was to see her something like other people; then stepping into his little green carriage, he was driven away, and in course of time disappeared in the valley between those two round hills that were covered with yellow buttercups.

Mrs. Seagrave shortly returned to the upper drawing-room, where she had left Margaret Grant. That young lady was still standing at the window with her original air of awkwardness and despondency. Mrs. Seagrave sat down on a couch, took up a skein of lambs' wool, and presently said, "Miss Grant, I wish you to come and sit here."

Miss Grant turned abruptly, and crossing the room with hurried steps, sat down in the chair indicated by her new preceptress, which was opposite the sofa, and she felt surprised when, instead of having to answer some formidable questions, the skein of lambs' wool was given to her to hold, while Mrs. Seagrave began tranquilly to wind it off. She wound it slowly, and intently watched the face of her new charge, who, still overcome with bashfulness, sat with her eyes modestly cast down.

Margaret was not pretty, her complexion, though pale, was not delicate, her nose was somewhat re-

troussé, her hair of a light brown colour, curled stiffly—so stiffly as to resemble lengths of shining twisted bell-rope—but her forehead was very fine and open, and her eyes, when she suddenly raised them, had such an eager expression of scrutinizing intelligence, that Mrs. Seagrave dropped hers as she encountered them, and felt that she was undergoing an examination in her turn.

“I found it difficult to believe that this heavy, awkward-looking girl could possess such wonderful abilities,” thought Mrs. Seagrave; “but that look of her eyes makes it very credible.”

They were very remarkable, those same eyes; they were large and lustrous, of that peculiar colour which is generally accompanied by extremely large pupils, and looks very dark by candle-light; but in the day time has a decided tinge of green. They were not handsome eyes by any means, but their beseeching was more eloquent than words, and their penetration was not easily withstood. Margaret, though her glance at Mrs. Seagrave had been but momentary, did not fail to notice a serenity of expression, and a quiet ease that were refreshing to one so restless as herself; she moreover observed that her new preceptress was conscious of her embarrassment, and kindly pitying it; so she gathered courage to say that she hoped her uncle, when he had described her peculiarities, had not forgotten to say that she was desirous to improve.

Mrs. Seagrave had not expected her pupil to begin the conversation, but Margaret had been represented to her as a very remarkable girl, and being desirous to form an opinion of her from herself, she passed over her audacity, and said, with a gentle smile, “Are you conscious, my dear, of any great difference between yourself and most other people?”

"O yes!" exclaimed Margaret, in her rich expressive voice, and with a heartfelt sigh.

"And you wish to be like them?"

"Outwardly, I do," replied Margaret; "it is of no use my wishing to be really like in mind and heart, for nothing can ever make me so."

"A curious speech from a girl scarcely sixteen to me," thought Mrs. Seagrave; but she took no notice of the blunt manner of her new pupil, merely remarking, "There is no wish on my part to see you like others, where you were intended by Providence to excel them. All that we wish is, to see you like in those respects where you now fall short."

"And those are—?" inquired Margaret.

"Among them," was the reply, "are manners—carriage—self-control—gentleness."

"Yes, I know," interrupted Margaret, as frankly as if she had been speaking to an equal instead of a superior; "but these things are infinitely more difficult for me to learn than for most girls."

"Why so?" asked Mrs. Seagrave.

"Because my feelings—I think—I am sure—"

"Go on," said Mrs. Seagrave, seeing that Margaret hesitated.

Margaret changed the form of her sentence a little, and said, "If my feelings are ten times as impetuous as most people's, the barrier that I erect to keep them back, must be ten times as strong, but it by no means follows that, because the *feelings* are strong, the *will* must be strong also; and then again, if my sense of what is fitting and beautiful is more than commonly keen, so much the keener is my feeling of awkwardness and shame at falling so far, so infinitely far short of it."

"Oh, I shall never be able to do anything with such a self-conscious and untamed young genius!"

thought Mrs. Seagrave ; "positively there is not a pupil in the house that will know what she means if she talks to them in this way."

" You should remember," she presently said, "that most other young persons, besides learning self-control, and some other things which we mentioned, have what is to them the far harder task of giving their minds to their education. Music, languages, grammar, arithmetic, things which it costs you scarcely any effort to acquire, are the utmost that they can learn by taking great pains. You have not this disadvantage; it is a *pleasure* to you to acquire knowledge, therefore let your *tasks* be to regulate and control your feelings, and to acquire the gentleness and the power to please which you have no right to undervalue. If you take this view of the subject, you will find your duty no harder than that of others of your age, even though your feelings *should* be more impetuous."

" Yes," said Margaret, struck with the observation, "that is very true."

" I am afraid," continued Mrs. Seagrave, "from what I have been told of you, that one reason why you are so deficient in many agreeable qualities, is, that you have despised and undervalued them."

Margaret admitted the truth of this, and continued, with sparkling and dilating eyes, "I do not *now*, I did till lately; I used to think when I found that I knew more than most women, that I need not care, though I could not behave like other girls, or even as well as most children."

" But now," was the reply, "I hope you have decidedly changed your mind."

" O yes," said Margaret, "for I must have some friends, I must, I must, and I cannot get them. *I take infinite* pains to please other girls, and they

only laugh at me, I am so shy, and so stiff, and so—so—”

“Not so *very* shy,” said Mrs. Seagrave, encouragingly, “for you have talked to me, who am a perfect stranger to you, not only with entire freedom, but even with more freedom than many people would think suitable, considering our relative position. No,” she said, smiling in spite of herself at the keen inquiring look of Margaret’s eye, “I do not think you have spoken too openly. I acknowledge such a difference between you and my other pupils, as makes me willing that you should talk to me differently.”

“Ah,” said Margaret, “you are so kind! If I knew how, I would treat you with the respect that I feel, but I forget myself. I wanted to explain to you what it is that I want, and I felt sure that you would understand me. I want to find out how to make myself beloved.”

“And cannot you succeed in that without being taught, my poor child?” said Mrs. Seagrave, softened by Margaret’s appealing face.

“No,” said Margaret; “I have tried a great many experiments, and I am never loved as much as I can love. If I could find a girl like myself, of course she would naturally love me, she could not help it; she and I could talk so delightfully together about many things that do not interest other girls; we should want each other, and understand each other. I should want no teaching then, but I do want teaching how to win the friendship of most girls, because they do not live in my world, and are not like me. I must step out of my world and go to seek them, and when I have done so, I cannot talk well to them, I cannot learn their talk, and they cannot understand mine.”

“And yet you desire their friendship and their company?” said Mrs. Seagrave.

"O yes," exclaimed Margaret; "and I see that all I know, and all that I can do, gives me no advantage, for I have found out that people are loved for what they are, and not for what they can do."

"You must not make *theories* on the subject of affection," observed Mrs. Seagrave; "and, if I were you, I would not try any more experiments. Moreover, you should remember that likeness is not always necessary in friendship, sometimes contrast is quite as valuable."

Margaret looked intently at her while she spoke, and then inquired whether Mrs. Seagrave thought she had any pupils who would be friendly to her.

"I think I have *one* whose regard you would do well to cultivate," was the reply, "and to whom your companionship might be of use; she is a great contrast to you."

"Is she pretty?" asked Margaret, abruptly.

"Yes, she is pretty, and amiable; she has a very steady and strong sense of duty. She has none of your advantages, for her lessons give her a vast deal of trouble; her name is Blanch Mostyn."

"May I see her?" asked Margaret.

"Yes; and she shall show you your room, which you are to share with her, and she will teach you the rules of my house."

Miss Mostyn was presently sent for, and Margaret instantly began to feel shy when she saw her. She came in with modest grace, and while Mrs. Seagrave was explaining to her that she was to be Margaret's friend for the present, and introduce her to the school-room, Margaret had time to admire her, and to wonder whether she should like her for a friend.

Her eyes were blue and smiling, her complexion rather pale, her features delicate, and her whole appearance graceful and self-possessed. She was dressed in a simple blue muslin frock, which, with

her small brooch and unrumped collar, looked as fresh as if just put on ; her shining hair was carefully arranged, and Margaret had not half done admiring her grace, her simplicity, and her deferential manner to Mrs. Seagrave, when the latter told Blanch she had no further directions to give her, and the two girls left the drawing-room together.

As Blanch and Margaret threaded the winding staircase to their room, Margaret made a theory which was intended to explain her companion's calm, unimpassioned manner ; but when the door of the pretty bed-room was shut, and Blanch, turning to Margaret, said in a quiet voice, "This is my bed, and that is yours, Miss Grant, and that is your chest of drawers," the utterly prosaic nature of the speech recalled this roving theorist to her senses, and she threw aside her theory, and decided that her companion's calm manner was owing to her being entirely free from any intention to fascinate, and also quite uninterested in the matter she had in hand, and merely desirous to perform it properly and politely, considering it, in fact, a very common-place affair, which perhaps was not unnatural. So Margaret made a commonplace answer, which Blanch received with a smile, and turned to her own dressing-table, pretending to occupy herself with her hair, (which was already as smooth as silk,) but, in reality, so much amused at Margaret's odd dress and manner, that she could scarcely venture to look in her face, lest she should betray her feelings. Margaret was arrayed in a puce-coloured silk dress, rather thick and heavy ; she wore a rich shawl, the prevailing colour whereof was orange ; and a handsome Leghorn bonnet, which was well trimmed with feathers and flowers, and would have been very suitable for a woman of fifty.

This costume had arisen out of a very simple circumstance. Her great-uncle, the archdeacon, though he knew when a lady was well dressed, was by no means equal to the task of explaining why one was well dressed, and another badly. He thought that his niece often looked odd, and he thought that a certain middle-aged lady, the wife of one of his curates, always looked particularly well; so, without any reference to the difference of age, he desired his niece to dress as *she* did. He was implicitly obeyed.

The archdeacon still thought that Margaret looked odd.

"Are you sure, Pussy," he observed one day, "that you are dressed *exactly* as our friend was when she called here the other day?"

"Precisely, uncle," replied Margaret; "nurse came in with a message on purpose that she might look at her, and help me to choose the things when she was gone."

"Humph," said the little old gentleman, walking round her with a perplexed expression; "well, it's an odd thing—it *is* an odd thing that nothing whatever, no amount of pains and observation on my part, will make this girl look like other people!"

"Isn't it right yet, uncle?" said Margaret, a little disappointed after all the pains she had taken.

"I suppose it ought to be right, my dear," was the reply; "and, after all, dress is not a matter of much importance;" this he added in rather a dubious tone.

"No," said Margaret, greatly relieved at the turn the conversation had taken. She had a Hebrew lexicon in her hand, and she abruptly lifted it up at this favourable moment, and consulted him about a "root," till he forgot her dress, and so the matter ended.

"Can I help you, Miss Grant?" said Blanch, turning from the glass as she observed that Margaret had seated herself on a chair, and was not attempting to divest herself of her walking-dress.

Margaret was too shy to accept her services, and said, "No, thank you; but if nurse might come up, I should be very glad."

"O, your nurse is come with you," observed Blanch.

"Come with me!" repeated Margaret, in a tone of dismay. "O yes, of course. I don't know how to do my hair; and, besides, I don't know where all the things in my boxes are to go!"

"Ah," said pretty Blanch, in a tone of calm simplicity; "then shall I ring for your nurse to come up?"

"Please," replied Margaret, greatly relieved, for she had thought it might be one of the rules of the house that the young ladies were to put their things in the drawers themselves; and though she considered it of importance that her drawers should be neat, her ideas were very vague as to how they were to be made so.

A tall, upright woman presently came in to answer the summons; she had thick shoes on, and a bunch of keys in her hand, with which she presently unlocked Margaret's boxes, and produced brushes and toilet requisites, and Blanch was amused to see that when she had undressed her nursling, she held up her face by the chin (as some nurses do to very young children) while she parted her curly ringlets.

A bell presently rang, and Blanch said, "That is the dressing-bell, Miss Grant; we dress for *tea* here instead of for *dinner*, because we dine early. I am not to dress to-day, because I have a cough."

The nurse, having no example before her as to how her young lady might be expected to dress,

looked perplexed, and at length ventured to appeal to Blanch to choose a frock for Margaret, who sat apart in her dressing-gown, as if it was no business of hers.

"Here's a green chéné-crape frock; and here's a white muslin all over rose-buds; or what do you think of her pink flounced barege, Miss, with silver ribbons?"

"I think these are too handsome," said Blanch. (She would not say too gaudy.)

"Ah," said the nurse, holding up the gay barege, "when Miss has this frock on and all her coral, she does look a picture!"

"Nurse," said Margaret, distressed, "no one but you can think I ever look well. Why do you talk in that way?" and while Margaret spoke she was keenly sensible of the girlish grace of Blanch. "Perhaps," she thought, "I might not look *quite* so plain if I were more plainly dressed; at least I should not appear to challenge notice for my plainness."

This was the first good that Blanch did her.

"I think you must make haste," she said, gently, and quite surprised at the expression of Margaret's face, which seemed to look appealingly at her, as if to beg for forgiveness for her want of beauty.

A dress was chosen, and Margaret duly arrayed in it. The nurse left the room, and Margaret, turning to Blanch, said, "I hope you do not dislike ugly people!"

Her face showed that she was very much in earnest; but her question was so odd, that Blanch could not help laughing.

"No," she replied; "I am not *quite* so foolish as to do that."

"Foolish, you consider it," said Margaret, musingly; "and yet children, who are *never* foolish, often dislike ugly people. I always did myself."

It was quite a new idea to Blanch that children are never foolish, and she looked surprised.

"I meant," said Margaret, explaining herself, "I meant that children are never deceived by professions; they do not believe they are loved only because they are told so; they know by instinct who cares, and who does not care, for them; but," she continued, seeing the puzzled look of Blanch, "I hope since you think it foolish to dislike ugly people, that you will not dislike me."

"I don't know why you should suppose—you should imagine," said Blanch, stammering and blushing, "that I think you particularly plain."

"But *did* you not think so when you first saw me?" asked Margaret; and Blanch, wishing herself a hundred miles off, but not able to escape the gaze of those lustrous, asking eyes, tried to evade the question by saying, "The first thing I did think about you was, that you were very shy."

"And the second?" asked Margaret.

"And the second," replied Blanch, looking into the wonderful eyes and recovering her self-possession, "the second I do not feel bound to tell."

Margaret sighed, and a sudden smile, the sweetness of which seemed to melt all the piercing clearness of her eyes, and overflow her features, covering them with sunshine, so astonished Blanch, that she gazed at her like one fascinated.

"The first thought I had about you," said Margaret, "was, that you were very pretty; and the second, that you were very self-possessed; and the third, that you would never like me. Oh, I am sure you never will!"

Blanch, who was not given to shyness, felt shy now. Margaret was a curious girl; someone who compelled her to think about her—she did not know what to say, and was delighted when the bell rang again to summon them to tea.

The two girls entered a pleasant, carpeted room ; Margaret was duly introduced to the other pupils by Blanch ; and, as she sat at tea, she rapidly formed an opinion concerning each. There were the two Miss Fieldings, Winifred and Penelope, slender girls, with sandy hair, rather prominent teeth, a lady-like air, and plenty of vapid chatter. "Nothing particular in them," thought Margaret ; "natures too soft to strike a spark from, and too cold to melt. I shall never feel shy with you, my dears."

Then there were the two Miss Whites, dark girls, black-eyed, black-browed, dark-haired, and high-coloured ; the one with a pretty, sulky mouth, the other decidedly stupid-looking. "I think I could make you smile," thought Margaret, looking at the pouting lips ; "and I think we have something in common ; but I am afraid you know nothing."

All these girls appeared to be nearly grown-up. Next to them came Blanch, and beside her sat two little girls about thirteen years of age, one exceedingly pretty, the other as remarkably plain. The pretty one, Emmeline Ord, had brown eyes, and very light, almost yellow, hair ; and her eye-lashes were of the same colour ; her face and her head were small ; her mouth like a rose-bud ; and her cheeks soft and dimpled, though scarcely tinted with the least rose-colour. There was, however, such an air of health spread over her whole face, that the usual bloom of childhood was not missed ; the child, however, had those softly *shining* eyes sometimes seen when babyhood is past, but not often ; they neither sparkled with intelligence, nor flashed with intellect ; they were not remarkably joyous, nor particularly clear, but they looked about them with that serene tenderness which is only to be expressed by the word "*shining*".

"It will satisfy my eyes to look at you," thought Margaret, "if you never yield me any other satisfaction." And the little girl never did yield her any other satisfaction.

And now let us describe the other and the last of the pupils. She was a pale child, and had a pink rim round her eyes, which were of a watery blue; her hair was red; her figure very thin; her mouth was plain, and her chin receded into her throat. "Poor little thing!" was all Margaret thought when she looked at her; and then she looked at the teacher, who was a German, tall, large-boned, and plain, with a sensible face and an honest, straightforward manner. The girls were talking about a prize that Mrs. Seagrave meant to give before the holidays. It only wanted five weeks to the holidays, and Mrs. Seagrave, when she heard that Margaret was coming, had decided that she was not to be debarred from trying for it also, though she came so late in the half-year.

"What was to be done for this prize?" Margaret inquired, for since she had seen her school-fellows, her shyness had very much abated. The same thing was not to be done by all the girls, they told her, and that would make it so much more interesting.

"Then," asked Margaret, "how is Mrs. Seagrave to judge who has done best?"

"It will be more difficult for her to do it, no doubt, than if we all did the same thing; she will have to decide for each whether she has done *her* best," said Blanch; "and then which is the most deserving, on the whole, according to her own idea of what we ought to be able to do."

Margaret had scarcely time to reflect upon this new mode of giving a prize when Mrs. Seagrave entered, and began to explain her intentions respecting it. The girls had been permitted to

choose for themselves what the said prize should be, and had decided upon a portrait of the giver.

"You are at liberty to try for it also, Miss Grant, if you wish to do so," said Mrs. Seagrave.

"Thank you, Mrs. Seagrave," replied Margaret, "but—though I should like to do so, I should be under a great disadvantage, because, of course, the portrait is of variable value according to the affection the *tryers* feel for you; and I—"

Here Margaret, feeling that she had made a blunder, stopped short.

"And I have not so much affection for you as your other pupils; consequently, you do not offer me the same incentive that you do my compeers. Is that what you were going to say?" observed Mrs. Seagrave. "Well, I acknowledge the justice of your objection. You may, if you win the prize, choose for yourself anything of equal value. Choose, then, whatever you would like best."

Margaret at first, when Mrs. Seagrave took up her unfinished speech, was overcome with confusion, but now recovering herself, she answered with spirit, "I choose the portrait; because, though it may not be of so much value to me as to another, I shall still prefer it to anything else that you could offer me."

"And now," said Mrs. Seagrave, "I will tell you all, young ladies, if you wish to be candidates for this prize, what I shall require of you respectively;" and so, beginning with Miss Fielding, and going down to the little pale-faced pupil, she gave to each her task. To one, music to transpose from one key to another; to a second, German to translate; to a third, sums to work; to a fourth, an act from one of Racine's plays to learn by heart; and so on till Margaret and Blanch were the only pupils left.

"Blanch, I intend you to write something for me," she then said. "You have just been reading Miller's '*Old Red Sandstone*', I should like you to give me, without looking at the book again, the best and clearest account of its contents that you can."

Blanch blushed, but seemed, though pleased with her task, a good deal oppressed with its importance and nature.

"Can you do it?" asked Mrs. Seagrave.

"I can try," answered Blanch, timidly.

"And I think I shall require some writing of you, Miss Grant," continued Mrs. Seagrave. "What do you think you can write for me?"

Margaret's eyes dilated with pleasure. Here was a task after her own heart!

"I think I could write an essay," she replied.

"An essay," repeated Mrs. Seagrave; "so let it be then. And on what subject is the essay to be written?"

"I think," said Margaret, simply, "I think I should like to write it on the mental differences which characterize the Gothic and the Greek mind."

So Mrs. Seagrave wrote down that Penelope Fielding was to do so many sums, and Ellen White was to learn some pages of Racine, and Margaret Grant was to write an essay "On the Characteristics of the Gothic and the Greek Mind." For the rest of the evening the other pupils looked upon Margaret as on a curious and alarming creature come from some other planet; but she, being already intent on her Greek and Gothic races, happily did not find it out.

That evening, when Margaret and Blanch were in their own room again, Margaret said, "How industriously you have been writing down your notes, Miss Mostyn!"

"Ah," said Blanch, shaking her head, "I could do my part better if I had a little, a very little, chance of success."

"If you have no chance of success," exclaimed Margaret, abruptly, "I wonder you try for the prize at all!"

Blanch looked surprised. "I am sure it is my duty to try," she answered, with her peculiar quietude of manner; "and, besides, I do not try only for success, but partly for improvement."

Margaret pondered on the sentiment a few minutes, and then said, with her usual abruptness, "I see you know how to *think*. Do you know, Miss Mostyn, I believe we are the only girls in the house who do think; who think, at least, on such subjects as motives, and our own minds and natures. But do tell me why you do not expect to succeed?"

"Because I shall have to try against you," answered Blanch; "and Mrs. Seagrave told me you were much beyond other girls of your age, and I am not. I am not even clever."

Now Margaret, like most other shy people, had her times for being particularly brave, so she answered, and with fearless frankness took for granted that she *was* clever, and that Blanch was not. "If Mrs. Seagrave really is so penetrating that she can tell which *deserves* the prize most, she must be able to see whether I have used my powers as conscientiously as you have done yours; so, you see, it becomes a *moral* question who is to win, not an intellectual one, for though my essay may be twice as good as yours, she may still see that I could have done it better if I had tried."

"But surely you *mean* to try!" exclaimed Blanch.

"O yes," said Margaret, carelessly; "but I think I hardly know what you mean by *really*

trying. What I can do seems to come to me almost by intuition; and for the rest I must let it go by. I cannot do it at all."

"Ah," said Blanch, almost discontentedly, "and unless I try very hard I can do nothing at all."

"Never mind," answered the genius, sleepily, "*you can try*, and I cannot; at least," she added, to spare herself the reproaches of her conscience, "it is such a trouble to try to do anything that I dislike, that it is the same thing as if I could not do it, for I never do."

Poor Margaret! After this speech Blanch did not like her nearly so well, and the next morning she woke in a shy humour, and Blanch, being cold and stiff, they were both very uncomfortable, and the presence of Margaret's old nurse was a great relief.

A whole week passed away. Margaret sometimes worked fitfully at her essay. Blanch always worked diligently during every moment of leisure. Margaret widened the great gulf that lay between her school-fellows and herself by unwisely letting them see her vast mental superiority, and then annoyed them by laborious efforts to talk as they did, and be interested in their trifling conversation. She also contrived to set the German teacher against her by putting her right when she talked about the literature of her own country; and she terrified the old writing-master, who gave them lessons in history and moral philosophy, by asking him questions that he did not understand; while all this time the beauty and sweetness of Blanch became more evident to Margaret's enthusiastic mind, and she loved her, and longed to have her for a friend; but Blanch did not quite understand, and did not entirely approve of her, so she withdrew herself, and shrank from any intimacy; and from day to day Margaret became more iso-

lated, till one half-holiday, seeing her walking quite alone in the garden, Mrs. Seagrave sent a servant to fetch her in, and Margaret was ushered again into the little upper drawing-room, where she found Mrs. Seagrave sitting alone.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Seagrave, "I sent for you that we might have a little conversation."

Margaret's face, always grave, had worn an anxious expression for some days; it brightened now, and she drew near with a look of relief and pleasure.

"Margaret," said Mrs. Seagrave, gently, "how are you getting on with your essay?"

Margaret heaved one of her weary sighs, and answered, "Tolerably, ma'am."

"Only tolerably?" said Mrs. Seagrave. "How is that, Margaret?"

"I could do it better," faltered Margaret, "if I were more—" and here she stopped short, and her eyes filled with mournful tears.

Her expression of countenance touched Mrs. Seagrave with a sensation of inexpressible pity.

"More happy, my poor child, you mean," she answered.

"Blanch will never like me—never love me," sighed Margaret.

"I have observed that you and Blanch do not get on together as I could have wished. Do you know why? Shall I tell you why?"

"Yes," said Margaret, lifting her wondering eyes to Mrs. Seagrave's sweet, sympathizing face.

"It is because Blanch cannot appreciate altogether your intellectual nature, which is superior to hers; but she can understand your motives and your moral nature, and that is inferior to hers; therefore, she does not want you for a friend; she aspires to have a friend who shall be very superior to herself."

"No one ever does wish for me for a friend," said Margaret.

"Margaret," said Mrs. Seagrave, "do you think it is interesting to meet with a perfectly new, fresh character, one which we think is likely to become a fine one?"

"Yes," said Margaret, "I think it is very interesting. Blanch is one of those characters. I do love her! and I cannot help watching her."

"Margaret, are you listening?" continued Mrs. Seagrave. "Do you think you should be pleased if you thought that some person whom you think of no more than Blanch thinks of you, had felt for you that very interest that she inspires in your mind? Come here."

Margaret looked at her wonderingly, and then came, and kneeling before her, put her arms round her waist. "Surely," she thought, "Mrs. Seagrave's eyes had not that sweet, tender expression the first time I saw her! How lovely she is! I am glad she is so kind!"

"No one ever will feel that sort of love for me," she answered, the tears glistening on her eyelashes.

"But, Margaret, if I told you that someone *did* feel it, should you be glad? Would it afford you any contentment? Don't you think (even if you had no answering affection) that you could rest with a very pleasant, welcome feeling of repose and trust upon a person to whom you were interesting—who liked the sound of your voice, and the look in your eyes? And do you think the knowledge that such an affection was felt for you would be any consolation to set against the coolness of Blanch?"

Margaret turned her face away on hearing this, but without unclasping her arms. She did not perceive the drift of what had been said, and it

sounded to her like a kind of mockery to suppose that she could be an object of anything like romantic interest to anyone living.

"It would be enough consolation," she said at length, "to set against the coolness of every person that ever was cool to me." (What a curious, curious lady she is, thought Margaret. I feel just that sort of repose she spoke of in being with *her*.)

"Suppose you kiss me, Margaret," said Mrs. Seagrave; "and suppose you try to understand," she continued as Margaret obeyed with all the tenderness of her impulsive nature, "that *I* feel this kind of interest in, and love for, you."

Margaret did not attempt to make any reply. The quiet manner in which she had been informed that she was an object of interest to a person of a mind so much more mature—so infinitely better disciplined than her own, and so well fitted to guide her, took away from her all doubt of the truth of the fact, strange though it appeared.

In all by-gone intercourse with her companions, the striving to please, the affection, and the caressing, had been on her side; on the other side they had been borne with, sometimes complacently, sometimes impatiently; now she remained passive with surprise and contentment while this new friend, so much better worth having than any of her old ones, continued to assure her that if she would try to correct her faults, faults (she now heard them called) of little moral importance, she would certainly be very much loved, and be very happy.

Margaret left the little pink drawing-room a different creature. She was deferential to the German teacher, kind to the vapid Miss Fieldings, she could afford to play with poor little sickly Miss Miller, and help her with her sums when she found her secretly crying over them. She

respected and liked Blanch as much as ever, but she ceased to crave for her affection, for she perceived that Blanch would never understand her as Mrs. Seagrave did. She, moreover, began fully to appreciate her great moral inferiority to Blanch ; and when she saw her day by day toiling over her notes for the prize essay, she wondered at her perseverance and the strength of her will. As for herself, the fable of the "tortoise and the hare" was fully realized in her ; she outstripped Blanch altogether the first week, and finished half the amount of composition which she had sketched out for her essay ; then the next week, something else that interested her coming in the way, she neglected it, thinking that the last week would afford her plenty of time. But the last week came, and with it so many other duties, that Margaret's essay was sent in, with three chapters beautifully written, and the fourth only just begun.

The next day it was given out in the schoolroom that Blanch had won the prize. Mrs. Seagrave considered that her theme displayed more pains-taking, more improvement, and on the whole, more merit, than anything that had been done by the other pupils. The theme was read aloud, and though Margaret perceived that it did not want spirit, she could not but reproach herself, and feel that if she had taken more pains, the prize must have been her own ; but then Blanch had worked so industriously, and kept so steadily to the one object, that Margaret respected her character more than her talent, and there was no envy mixed with her admiration.

Mrs. Seagrave raised her from these thoughts by desiring her to read her own fragment aloud, and she did so extremely well, excitement preventing her from feeling shy.

No remark was made upon it ; none of the

pupils, excepting Blanch, could appreciate it. "What do you think of it, Blanch?" asked Mrs. Seagrave.

"I think," said Blanch, gently, "that its not being finished is the only reason why I have the prize."

Yet though Blanch spoke modestly, her heart was beating fast with delight; she had not only secured for herself a portrait of one whom she greatly loved, but had been able to perform a very difficult task, and a task in composition, which was a thing in which she longed to excel; and Margaret thought she had never seen her look so lovely, as when she lifted her face to Mrs. Seagrave for the kiss which she gave her with the prize; a kiss which brought and left a slight tint of rose to her usually clear fair cheek.

The next day Blanch and all the pupils, excepting Margaret, were taken home by their friends. In the evening, after Margaret had enjoyed a delightful stroll in the garden with Mrs. Seagrave, she was told that her uncle had arrived. She ran into the pink drawing-room to see him; and if he hoped to see her altered for the better, his most sanguine expectations were realized. The profusion of curls, which had before loaded her head, and made it look far too large for her height, were now combed back, and her hair was simply arranged so as to show the fine outline of her head; all her superfluous ornaments were discarded, and she was dressed in the simplest of white muslin gowns, with no relief but a little dark-green velvet about her neck and waist.

"Why, Pussy," said he, "you look uncommonly well; very like other people!"

Margaret received this as a gratifying compliment.

"And so," continued the archdeacon, "you have

been trying for a prize and been worsted! ignominiously worsted; ha—ha—plucked, Pussy, in your little go!"

"Yes," Margaret answered. "And so you must never be afraid again of my being too clever, Uncle; for the girl who won the prize is younger than I, and—and not very highly endowed."

Here again was matter for exultation to the little bright-eyed old man; he rubbed his hands, and his twinkling eyes expressed his almost parental pride and pleasure. "I don't like blue stockings," was his old-fashioned remark. "And if I ever meet with the young lady who outstripped you, child, I shall give her a testimonial of my gratitude for doing me that benefit."

"Do, Uncle," said Margaret. "I am fond of her; she is a sweet girl. Give her one of old Nell's pups; she has a passion for dogs."

"Dogs!" exclaimed the archdeacon. "Can a woman love both dogs and letters?"

"Even so," said Margaret; "and she can be pretty into the bargain."

The archdeacon laughed; but Mrs. Seagrave presently entering, he began to thank her for the care she had taken of his niece, and to express his delight at finding her so much improved. Margaret, meanwhile, was sent away to prepare for her journey, and when she returned, she found that her uncle had been pressing Mrs. Seagrave to pay him a visit, and that the invitation had been accepted.

So Margaret could leave her temporary home with a glad heart; the only person whom it had been a sorrow to part with, was shortly to follow her.



CHAPTER II.

BLANCH.

“Hark! the home-voices call
Back to thy rest,
Back to thy father’s hall,
Thy mother’s breast.”

MRS. HEMANS.

BLANCH’S home was in Hampshire, in a sheltered village in the midst of those extensive downs with which that county abounds. There was no particular beauty in the parsonage of Thorpe Mandeville, (for that was the name of the parish of which Blanch’s father was vicar,) but yet Blanch loved it dearly. Her father had lived there now full twenty years. Blanch was the eldest of eight children, and they had all been born in the rambling old white house, and spent many happy days in its low lattice-windowed nursery. The house was not unpicturesque from its very irregularity. Low, two-storied, with many gables, and quaint projecting rooms, poked out as the family increased, there was now a covering of ivy, roses, and honeysuckle, over great part of it, which hid many architectural defects with their soft green leaves; and as Blanch stretched her head out of the carriage-

window to catch the first possible glimpse of her dear home, it certainly looked bright to *her*, with the radiant light true affection casts over all it loves, animate or inanimate.

A cry of "Blanch! Blanch!" issued from the nursery-window as Blanch's fly turned in at the gate; and as she drove up, the old-fashioned porch was crowded with welcoming faces. Caroline and Arthur were first, in right of their age. Carrie, the next to Blanch, a tall, slim, awkward girl of fifteen and a half, with soft dark eyes and wavy brown hair, had the first embrace; then came Arthur, a stout schoolboy of fourteen, the genius and the pride of the family, Blanch's especial favourite; then a mass of little fair creatures, with flaxen hair and blue eyes and joyous faces—Emma and Charlie, Alice and little Ann.

When they all got into the hall, Blanch paused under the old-fashioned polished oak staircase. It was so smooth, bright, and shiny, that all visitors prophesied those uncarpeted steps would be "the death of those children some day." But they had all escaped the danger, and even took a certain delight in the perilous excitement, so that a rush of pattering feet from top to bottom of the stairs, had become one of the familiar household sounds. Blanch's progress was arrested now, however, by a different and far more melancholy sound. Loud cries reached her ear, as of a small child in distress, which came echoing down from under the skylight, and proceeded from little Master Aubrey, who had been prevented from following his brothers and sisters down stairs by a nursery-gate, which, according to Mrs. Mostyn's wise regulation, was ordered to be kept always closed whenever there was a child under three in the house. Ann, according to orders, had fastened it behind her, and poor little Aubrey, feeling

dreadfully ill-used when he heard Blanch's cheerful voice below, expressed his feelings of injured innocence by a tremendous roar. It answered, however, as such experiments very frequently *do*, (however wrong it may be to mention it,) for Blanch darted up, released him, and carried him in triumph into the library. Here she found her father, deeply engaged with his sermon for the ensuing Sunday; and her gentle mother lying as usual on the sofa, where an increasing spine complaint seemed likely to confine her more and more.

"What about the prize, Blanch?" cried Arthur, impatiently, before the parental greetings were half over.

"Oh, I have got it," said Blanch, quietly; "but really I did not deserve it. The new pupil I told you about did her subject far better than I did mine, only it never got finished. She is too clever to study at fixed times and hours, as duller heads can do."

"Oh, Blanch, it is jolly that you have brought home the prize!" cried Arthur, clapping his hands, while Blanch's heart glowed within her at the brightness the tidings of her success brought over her father's and mother's care-worn faces. *That* was her best reward; and on the way home she had been looking forward to it, as well as to another *great* pleasure—reading her abstract to her brother Arthur.

"I am longing to see this famous theme!" cried Arthur.

"By-and-by—after tea!" said Carrie, (with an elder sister's air, which amused Blanch, who had been accustomed to look upon her as a mere child.) "Blanch has not seen her own little room yet."

"Nor the nosegay we have put for her!" chimed in Emma and Alice; and the girls carried

her off to her own little room, which looked very bright, with its fresh nosegay, and clean white dimity bed-furniture.

"Blanch," said Carrie, gravely, when they had got her to themselves, "do you know Emma and I are writing a story? and we do want so to read it to you! We have told no one except Alice and Ann, and it is a great secret. You must not say a word of it to papa or mamma, or the boys!"

"No, not till you give me leave," said Blanch, repressing a smile at the importance her sisters attached to their first effort at authorship.

"We have got a secret, too!" cried Alice and little Ann. "We are making a terrace in the kitchen-garden. Come and see it, Blanch, *do!*!"

"Do hear our story first, will you not?" pleaded Emma, eagerly, pointing to a huge roll of very ragged-looking copy-books under her arm.

"Nay, the garden first!" said Alice, earnestly.

"Blanch!" cried Arthur's voice at the door, "may I come in? Here are your boxes; will you unpack your essay?"

Blanch let him in, and gazed affectionately at his fine open countenance. His large clear blue eyes were the very counterpart of her own, but his hair was dark, and his whole appearance and bearing very manly for his age. Blanch was struck now, however, by the very threadbare appearance of his clothes—painfully struck—and a cold chill fell upon her heart, as she thought her parents must indeed be in real poverty if they could let its visible tokens rest upon their darling Arthur; but possibly her mother might not have observed; she would mention it, and see.

Her meditations were interrupted by Arthur's own cheery voice, asking "if she had heard the great news?"

"What news?" said Blanch. "I have heard nothing particular."

"Oh! but it is **very** particular, isn't it, sister?" said Arthur, turning to Carrie, who made a very significant face, but spoke not, while Blanch, rather nervously entreated to be told at once.

"Well then, there's a young gentleman coming to live here," cried Emma, rather triumphantly, as if certain of producing a sensation.

"To live here!" echoed Blanch, in considerable alarm.

"Yes! to live here," added Arthur. "Papa told us yesterday. He's going to cram him for something or other—coach him up. He begged we would all be very civil to him, and kind, and all that. His father's a Scotchman, but he lives in Cheshire now; and this young gent's name is Morgan Arthur Macdonald!"

"What can induce papa to have him?" was on Blanch's lips, but the truth flashed upon her too sadly and surely in an instant; it was want of money—want of money to educate his own children as he wished, which obliged her dear father to add to his daily work, instead of resting. Oh! it was a sad thought, but Blanch's attention was happily diverted by Charlie hallooing under the window, and a renewed petition from Alice and Ann that she would come into the garden.

The cheerful stirring noise of home-bustle was beginning again round Blanch; no wonder that in such a genial atmosphere, and with hardly time to think, she had grown up more sociable and lovable to the world in general than poor solitary Margaret! Blanch's faculties always seemed really to increase under the demands made upon them by so many little claimants, and the charm of her manner was felt by all. Many would have excited jealousies, even now in the first hours of her re-

turn, but she calmed them. She whispered to Emma that she must read their manuscript first to herself, if they would leave it in her room at bed-time, and then another day they could study it well together; and taking Alice and Ann by the hand, she said they would go down to Charlie and have one run round the garden before tea; while Arthur unpacked her book-box, (of which she gave him the key,) and hunted out the manuscript.

By the time they accomplished their "one run," however, Mrs. Mostyn was clamorous for Blanch to come to tea, and all were soon assembled round the large table in the dining-room.

"How pleasant it feels to be at home again!" cried Blanch, as she fell quite naturally into one of her hundred-and-one bits of home-usefulness, and began cutting Aubrey's bread and butter into little square dice-shaped pieces, ready for immediate consumption. "I cannot fancy a pleasanter teacher than Mrs. Seagrave, and yet I am always so thankful to be at home!"

"Well! we are all as glad to have you, I think, my little Blanch!" said her father, kindly. "Your mother has been very poorly ever since your last holidays, and nothing has seemed to go right without you!"

"Nothing went right at school, I'm sure!" exclaimed Emma, rather pertly.

"What's been the matter?" inquired Blanch.

Charlie took the answer upon himself, and replied, "Only Master Arthur came home with a black eye this time, and has been 'as cross as a bear with a sore head,' as the saying goes, whenever school is mentioned ever since!"

Blanch looked earnestly at Arthur, and read in his face there was much more to vex him than a black eye, but she prudently reserved all further

questions till they should be alone together. Meanwhile she gazed on her father with a saddened heart, for even amidst all the excitement of receiving her, she marked a dark shade of care upon his face, a look of restless anxiety in his eye, which spoke of mental trouble. Mrs. Mostyn, too, looked pale and care-worn, confined as she was almost entirely to her sofa; with little variety except being occasionally able to go a little in the garden in a wheeled-chair, she had less chance of shaking off her cares than one who could freely enjoy fresh air and sunshine—the best balm for every mental wound.

"Blanch! Blanch! you are very silent!" exclaimed the children, while she was pondering over these things. "You have never asked after Nero yet!"

Now Nero was Blanch's own great pet—a very handsome Newfoundland dog. It was reckoned a very valuable one, and a cousin of Blanch's, who was gone abroad, had given it her as a puppy; and it was such a delight to her, that her father never could find in his heart to banish it, although it was really an expensive luxury in their circumstances.

Thus recalled from her musings, Blanch expressed due anxiety about her favourite; and then assured her sisters she had longed for him not a little at school, "to astonish the girls;" and she sent the little ones into fits of laughing by describing how frightened some of "the girls" were at dogs, and how half-a-dozen of them, with the German teacher at their head, had run away from a farm-house to which Mrs. Seagrave had sent them with a message, because there was a dog lying quietly in the road near the gate!

"But *you* were not afraid, Blanch!" said Carrie, a little indignantly; "*you* did not turn back!"

"I was obliged," said Blanch, calmly. "The Fraulein desired I would."

"Part of school discipline, my dears," remarked Mr. Mostyn, "and one of the most useful parts, too, to be obliged sometimes to obey, *for obedience's sake*, unjust or foolish orders. Home-rule is too tender, too just, to fit you *sufficiently* for walking the paths of this rough world afterwards."

Blanch pondered a good deal on these words; her father's little wise sentences, which were invariably very few and far between, but very pithy, always made her *think* a great deal. But now tea was over, and she could no longer resist Arthur's mysterious signs, who kept pointing alternately at the door and at the end of Blanch's manuscript, which protruded from his pocket. So she ran for her straw hat, and followed him through the garden to one of their old favourite spots—a copse at the bottom of one of the steep turf-covered hills which rose on every side of the little village of Thorpe Mandeville.

"How jolly it is to have you again," said Arthur, flinging his arm fondly round Blanch as they sat down on a fallen tree side by side. "I have wanted to talk to you so often since you went!"

"What is all this about a black eye, Arthur?" inquired Blanch. "I hope you have not been quarrelling?"

"I could not help it, Blanch, just that once! I am sure you would have fought too!"

"I!" exclaimed Blanch, a good deal amused. "They must have provoked you very much!"

"Yes," said Arthur, colouring crimson; "they had been getting up a subscription for a present for the master, and I hadn't a penny; and I *was* sorry, too, for he *is* a good fellow. I'd spent my last sixpence the week before; and I *couldn't* ask my father for more before quarter-day, I knew he

couldn't afford it. And then the fellows jeered, and one said my father must be a screw—and—and—I knocked him down! and afterwards he got up and gave me a black eye; that was all! Now, Blanch, *do* read me your theme!" and he pushed the papers into her hand, which Blanch thought it advisable to begin at once.

"Capital! Blanch, capital!" cried Arthur, ecstatically, when she had finished it. "I am sure none of the fellows, not even the sixth form themselves, could have done it as well. Several of them were reading the 'Old Red Sandstone' last half, but I'll wager they couldn't have written as much as that down afterwards, without looking at it again! How could you possibly remember the name and all of that queer old fish, the *Pterich-thys?*"

"Oh! I remembered *that* because of the pretty little sentence about it when he wished he 'could communicate to the reader' his delight on 'finding the first specimen!' I thought how delightful that *must* have been, and I turned to the picture and learnt the name. You see that was a sort of little story, and helped to fix it in my mind, luckily for me; but it was all chance, Arthur! I am *so* stupid! I wish I was as clever as you, or as Margaret Grant!"

"Bother Margaret Grant!" exclaimed Arthur, rather unceremoniously. "You're always writing and talking about her cleverness. All I know is, Blanch, if you're not clever, *you can do more than those that are*, if you wrote that theme!"

The words sank deep into Blanch's heart, but they were interrupted by Charlie's voice hallooing for Arthur; and she sought her mother's couch for a quiet half-hour's talk before evening prayers and bed-time.

"Arthur's clothes look very shabby, mother,"

said Blanch, gently. "Is he wearing out his old ones before he goes to school?"

"He does want new ones *very much*," said Mrs. Mostyn, with a deep sigh.

"Is the money, then, so short?" said Blanch, sadly.

"We are very poor just now, my dear," said Mrs. Mostyn, as cheerfully as she could. "Arthur must wait another quarter, I am afraid."

"I am a great expense to you, I know!" remarked Blanch, very sadly.

"You will only have half-a-year more, dear," said her mother, finally; "and I think it would break my heart to have to take you away from Mrs. Seagrave's; you have had so few advantages, and you seem getting on so well now."

Blanch sighed, and kissed her mother's pale forehead tenderly; and when she went to bed that night, she was more full of thought than she had almost ever been before. Arthur's words echoed in her ears. Her heart was heavy. Blanch looked upon her parents, and could see that trouble was weighing down those dear heads before their time. Anxiety for their children, struggles with poverty for *their* sake, self-deprivation that *they* might be educated—these things had been going on long, and now were beginning to tell both on Mr. and Mrs. Mostyn. Blanch saw the change more clearly from her own temporary absence; and oh! how it pained her!

Sometimes the calling forth of any very strong feeling will exalt and ennoble a whole character that might otherwise have gone on in lukewarm common-placeness to the end. Such a change was beginning to take place in Blanch. The first seed of it was sown as she gazed on those altered faces in her home. Blanch had been hitherto rather what would be called an undecided character—

very amiable, very persevering even from a sense of duty, with warm affections and a passionate temper, but yet not *grand*, not *interesting*, in any way, except from her beauty, which would be fascinating to many. A strong stimulus was what Blanch wanted, and this began to dawn upon her now, clothed in the simple words, "What can I *do*?—What can I *do for them*?" Oh! if she could *but* get on!—could but improve herself enough in the next half-year, to profit by her acquirements—to earn something afterwards by writing, or translating, or *something*; enough to get Arthur a new coat; or perhaps to pay half-a-year's schooling; or perhaps—but Blanch checked her imagination in its flight, though enough deep thought remained to absorb her intensely; but, like a good sister as she was, she did not forget her promise to Carrie and Emma, but waded through the beginning of their grand romance (entitled, "Ethel-drede and Imogene; or, a Tale of the Crusaders," and filling up three old copybooks, in round-hand between the lines,) before she went to bed.





CHAPTER III.

THE OLD RECTOR.

“‘A genuine Priest,’
The Shepherd of his flock ; or as a King
Is styled when most affectionately praised,
The Father of his people. Such is he ;
And rich and poor, and young and old, rejoice
Under his spiritual sway. He hath vouchsafed
To me some portion of a kind regard
And something also of his inner mind
Hath he imparted ; but I *speak* of him
As he is known to all. The calm delights
Of unambitious piety he chose
And learning’s solid dignity ;—though born
Of knightly race nor wanting powerful friends,
Thither in prime of manhood he withdrew
From academic bowers. He loved the spot—
Who does not love his native soil ?—he prized
The ancient moral character, composed
Of simple manners, feeling unsuppressed
And undisguised, and strong and serious thought.”
WORDSWORTH. *The Excursion.*

BLANCH awoke unusually early the next morning, full of new thoughts, and plans, and “aspirations.” She flung open her window, and all summer sounds came in ;—the singing of the early birds ; the humming of the bees in the flowers of the

honeysuckle which half covered the wall of the house ; the whetting of the old man's scythe, who was Mr. Mostyn's factotum, and who was just setting to work to mow the lawn this dewy morning ; and the distant sheep-bells from the Downs, where the shepherd-boys were already driving out their flocks from their night's shelter in the fold ; —all these sweet sounds fell on Blanch's ear that bright summer's morning. On some natures such moments of enchantment, when all earthly beauties seem combined to give a transient gleam of Paradise, have an enervating and dreamy influence. Blanch's mind was too well regulated, however, and too much under her own control, for this to be the case with her. Besides, there were so many matter-of-fact things to be done ; things that must be done somehow, and which there were few hands to do ; that she knew she ought to make haste and dress, that she might go and see how she could be most useful. These happy matter-of-fact duties ! they are so good for woman's mind ; and, where they really abound, preserve her so effectually from all the morbid suffering so often caused by a romantic imagination and a nervous temperament, that none should ever complain of having too much work ready to their hand. Blanch did not neglect her toilet, however. One of her mother's daily fears was lest the degree of " scramble," which is unavoidable in a large family with but few servants, should make her girls unneat and slatternly ; and so, from their first beginning to dress themselves (which happened when they left the nursery at eight years old), she made a point of giving great encouragement and occasional little rewards to the one who appeared neatest and best dressed. Blanch looked very bright as she came out of her little room, in a clean pink *muslin* frock, with white linen cuffs and collar ; a

black silk apron, and a piece of black velvet round her throat, fastened with her only valuable ornament; a small blue enamelled brooch studded with pearls, and containing her father's and mother's hair. She hastened to the nursery first, where old nurse was delighted to resign Alice and Ann into her hands, while she herself proceeded to take up Master Aubrey, the most unruly of the family, as the youngest is oftentimes wont to be. Blanch finished dressing the little girls, and, having heard them say their prayers, and taught them each one verse out of the Bible, she took them down with her into the garden, and made them hold her baskets, while she gathered a dish of fresh strawberries and a bunch of beautiful roses to adorn the breakfast-table.

"That looks like Blanch being at home!" said Mrs. Mostyn, pointing to the plate of fruit neatly set out on fresh dewy green leaves, and the crimson German glass vase full of lovely roses.

Blanch was richly repaid for her trouble by the look of love both father and mother gave her. Oh, how life is beautified by such little things if people would but think so, and not despise "*the day of small things.*" After breakfast Blanch was longing to go to a great friend she had, who lived about two miles from Thorpe Mandeville, and was the Rector of the adjoining parish. He was the greatest possible contrast to Blanch in all ways; a tall old man, with very bushy grizzly eyebrows, and a stiff, awkward manner; but Mr. Mowbray was Blanch's godfather; he had taken a great fancy to her, from a child—had taught her French and German, and bestowed great pains on her education—and her great hope for all her plans and aspirations rested on his approval. It was no use telling them to Mr. or Mrs. Mostyn. Mr. Mostyn was too busy, and would have quenched

them all with a "Nonsense, my dear child!" and Mrs. Mostyn would only have cried at the thoughts of her favourite Blanch thinking of what she would have called, "sacrificing herself so." So Blanch knew her natural and best adviser was Mr. Mowbray, to whom all questions about her education had always been referred, and determined on seeking him out the very first leisure moment she could find. That, however, was slow in coming. Mrs. Mostyn felt unusually languid and poorly that morning. "Blanch, dear, do go and order dinner for me," she said, "and talk to the cook about making some preserves. I think the children might gather some of the fruit now you are at home to look after them." And after that Blanch had to give Carrie and Emma a music lesson, which was always her office; but the *first* after a long cessation never failed to be a trial both to pupil and teacher; there was so much to *unlearn*, and so many bad habits to correct, that had crept in during the long practising by themselves. Then, as a reward for tolerable patience during the lesson, Blanch discussed the story they were writing, and speaking of it carefully and tenderly as of a thing very near their hearts, and which for some weeks past had been the glory and delight of their lives, she yet ventured to suggest that they *might* find it difficult to go on if they killed *all* their principal personages before the end of the fourth chapter; as when she finished the third Etheldrede and her betrothed had both perished; and Imogene, after sundry hair-breadth escapes from drowning and burning, was lying at the point of death in the dungeon of a castle on the Rhine. The suggestion was taken in good part, and Carrie and Emma promised to think seriously of it, and accordingly shut themselves up together immediately after the early dinner. Mr.

Mostyn went to see a sick parishioner, and Mrs. Mostyn undertook to mind Aubrey who had a cold and could not go out, while Nurse took Alice and Ann a walk; the boys went fishing, and Blanch was at last quite free to set off for Netherby—Mr. Mowbray's home. Very happy she felt as she climbed the hill she had to cross, and her foot pressed once again the soft thymy turf of her native downs. There was something very like the sea in that broad expanse of wild smooth hill and dale, with no trees, save in the sheltered hollows between the hills, and a refreshing breeze generally blowing over it. Nero bounded along by Blanch's side, carrying her basket, in which she had put her theme which Mr. Mowbray had written her word he wanted to see, and one or two other attempts at writing which she had taken out of her portfolio, all unfinished as they were, in order that he might judge the better if there were any chance of her succeeding in her wish. From time to time the dog rushed forward as if to spend his spirits in the fresh wind; but he was ever in a moment again by Blanch's side, thrusting his great black nose into her hand as if to remind her she was not alone. Margaret would have been surprised if she had seen the quiet Blanch racing him down the last hill into Netherby; but her native air had wound her up to an unusual state of excitement, mental and bodily, and her countenance was beaming when she arrived at Netherby. She passed along the outside of the Churchyard wall, casting a look of love on the beautiful old Church with its square grey tower and long low body; and, using a privilege vouchsafed to her alone, she and Nero entered the Rectory garden by a wicket gate, and advanced boldly to Mr. Mowbray's study window. The Rectory was a tall, square, ugly, yellow house, with most unpicturesque sash-

windows ; but it was a substantial good house, with plenty of room for books, and a pretty view out of the window, and that was all Mr. Mowbray cared about ; so he spent all he could afford on his Church and parish, and never dreamt of beautifying his own house. He was now seated in the study, and the glass doors, which opened down to the floor, wide open ; but he himself so absorbed in a great brown folio volume which lay before him that he never heard Blanch's light step, and was only awoke to a sense of her presence by Nero, who, wearying of standing stock still contemplating the old Rector, as Blanch was doing, began wagging his long tail with such energy that it gave several reverberating knocks against the glass door.

"Come in ! eh, Nero ! What's that ? Nero ! Blanch ! my child !" cried the old Rector, starting up, and upsetting two blotting-books full of loose papers and a dictionary, while he stepped forward to enfold Blanch in his long lanky arms ; "So you are come home, and come to see your old godpapa the first thing ! Unspoilt still, eh, Blanch ?"

"I trust so," said Blanch, earnestly ; "but I deserve no credit for coming to see you, dear uncle, (for so, by his desire, she always called Mr. Mowbray,) because I want so much to consult you about things."

"Nothing wrong at home, I hope, eh ?" said Mr. Mowbray, in his sudden way. "Neither father nor mother look very well, eh ?"

"No," said Blanch, too much used to his abrupt manner to be frightened, as many would have been at his remark. "I perceived they were not looking so when I left them, and I think papa is worried. It has been an expensive year, you know, with my schooling and Arthur's too. I am grieved to think how much I have cost them !"



"Come home, then," said Mr. Mowbray, looking at her fondly.

"So I will, dear uncle, in six months," said Blanch. "Mamma wished me to stay a whole year; and I feel now, if God gives me health and strength, I can get on more perhaps in the next six months than in the last six years of my life. You know you always said I wanted a little ambition to help me on; and now I feel as if I had so earnest a wish to improve myself, and for such a reason too, that I *must* get on; but you know I am so stupid, it will be doubly hard for *me!*"

Mr. Mowbray gave her a fond glance as if he rather doubted the stupidity, and said, "Well! what now?" as if prepared to hear something more important than usual.

"I am almost afraid to tell you, dear uncle, for fear you should laugh; it seems so absurd that *I* should have plans of that sort," replied Blanch; "but, do you know, I really gained the prize with my theme which I have brought you to read? (Don't look at it now, please, but keep it till I am gone; I have written the rules all about it on the top.) And this has made me so hopeful—so conceited, I suppose, you will say,—I have been thinking if I could *ever*—if I could, by giving all the time I can spare from real duties, you know, to work hard—by translation, or *anything*, get a little money to help Arthur on with—but you are laughing at me!"

No! Mr. Mowbray was not laughing; the extraordinary contortion he made just then of his grizzly eyebrows was done to prevent crying; for, in spite of all his stern looks, he was very easily moved to tears; but he commanded himself to say in an unusually gruff voice, "I will think about it, child! I will think about it!"

"Oh, thank you!" cried Blanch; for this was

far more encouragement than she had dared to expect ; " and you will tell me in a day or two—if I might try—if I should tell Mrs. Seagrave—if I may think of it as a plan in short ? I found two other scraps of writing I did at school last night. I have brought them, too, for you to see ; one is a translation, the other—"

" An imagination ?" suggested Mr. Mowbray.

" Oh, no, dear uncle ! You know I have no imagination ! only a little village story written down—a simple matter-of-fact. The girl I wrote you word about, who shares my room, has done me good I think, though we were never great friends ; but there is something about her so very suggestive—it makes me think."

" That is a great thing at any rate," replied Mr. Mowbray, and so they talked on ; he gradually, by short questions, drawing out Blanch's thoughts, plans, and feelings, till at last the church-bell began to go for his afternoon service.

" Now shut up Nero," he said, " and come into Church, and try and forget your dreams for two whole days, and work hard at home as usual, and then come to me again, and I will give you an opinion."

And Blanch committed Nero to a short solitary confinement in a dark stable, (to his great disgust and her own discomfort of mind subsequently,) and followed her uncle into Church. There we will leave them and close the chapter with the description of the *Church* by the same hand with whose description of the Pastor we began it.

" The portals of the sacred pile
Stood open ; and we entered. On my frame,
At such transition from the fervid air,
A grateful coolness fell, that seemed to strike
The heart, in concert with that temperate awe
And natural reverence which the place inspired.

Not raised in nice proportions was the pile,
But large and massy ; for duration built ;
With pillars crowded, and the roof upheld
By naked rafters intricately crossed,
Like leafless underboughs, in some thick wood,
All withered by the depth of shade above.
Admonitory texts inscribed the walls,
Each in its ornamental scroll enclosed."

The Excursion, Book 5.





CHAPTER IV.

A SACRIFICE.

"Some men can change their inner lives by power
Akin to witchcraft's lawless transmutation,
And, by a shock of feeling, in one hour
Set their soul's helm to some new constellation."

FABER.

BHE three days of waiting certainly appeared unusually long to Blanch. With all her desire of entering into home duties, the anxiety that filled her mind made them appear unusually tedious. She thought the children tiresome, and then was shocked at herself for not taking her usual interest in them. The day she was to have gone to Mr. Mowbray, too, it rained—persevering, grey, steady rain, which made her mother say in her most decided tone, "Of course, Blanch, you will not think of walking four miles to-day," and compelled her to give up all thoughts of it. It was a trial of patience, and as such no doubt very useful. At last came a summer's day, lovely and bright as heart could wish to see. The children were all seized with a gardening mania; and late in the afternoon Blanch was free to walk off to her friend.

So great was the influence of that calm, soft day, that it even tempted Mr. Mowbray out, and Blanch did not find him in his study as usual, but under a large beech-tree on the lawn. Nero bounded forward to him, but at the word of command from his young mistress lay down still and motionless on the turf, and Blanch was soon seated beside him, looking up in the rector's face with her bright eyes.

"Well, child," said Mr. Mowbray, "I have thought a good deal about you; and first, do you really wish me to advise you?"

"Indeed I do," said Blanch, "most anxiously wish it!"

"No doubt *in a way*, but that is not what I mean. I mean, do you intend to *take* my advice, even though it be not all pleasant, and some of it may seem difficult to act upon?"

"I do mean it fully, dear Uncle," said Blanch; "but do tell me, do you agree to my plan—to my wishes, I mean?"

"If you are really in earnest," said the rector. "And if (which I am by no means sure of, Blanch) you have power and energy enough in your character to carry out your purpose patiently for years, I would bid you God speed, and help you on your way with all the counsel an old man like me can give. But I doubt your patience."

"Do not doubt me!" cried Blanch, imploringly. "I will not mind trouble and work, indeed I will not."

"No, not work, perhaps, but waiting; how shall you like waiting? If I have anything to do with the scheme, Blanch, I shall exact a promise from you—not to print, nor attempt to print, anything till you are past twenty!"

"Oh!" groaned Blanch, "and I am but sixteen now. What a long, long time!"

"You are nearly seventeen, I think," remarked Mr. Mowbray. "September, is it not? and that will soon be here; and then you will have three years to practise in, for of course I do not mean you should not write; on the contrary; only you have so much to learn, you will diminish your own chance of success if you will not wait. In the first place, you must learn English!"

"English?" said Blanch, with a comic look of surprise.

"Yes, *English*," repeated Mr. Mowbray. And then he produced her writings, and picking out single sentences here and there, which, after a careful reading, he had underlined with his pencil, he showed poor Blanch so many bits of dreadfully bad grammar, such involved sentences, such repetitions of words, and in some places such thorough nonsense, that in utter despair she exclaimed that she was sure she should never be able to write at all!

"Never is a long day," said Mr. Mowbray with a smile. "Do not be inconsistent, Blanch; first three years is such a long, *long time*; and then life is not long enough!"

"I spoke hastily," said Blanch, blushing deeply. "You see how much I want a steady guide and adviser! I *will* promise to act by your advice, dear Uncle. But Arthur will have left school altogether!"

"He will need help long after he has left school," said Mr. Mowbray. "What do you think of college? or beginning in any profession? Ah, these things want money!"

"Everything does, I think," sighed Blanch.

"Yes," said Mr. Mowbray. "It is a necessary evil, and will be as long as we remain in this world. But now, Blanch, how am I to know that you are really in earnest?"

"How can I *prove* it," said Blanch, sadly, "even to myself? I can only *say* I will strive on patiently and perseveringly in the hope of a success I may never attain. What else would you advise me to do?"

"As to practical directions of *what* you had better read and write for the purpose of improving yourself *in writing*, I will give you a written paper of the best I can make out. I should recommend your talking freely to Mrs. Seagrave on the subject. She seems a sort of person who would understand you if you revealed all your motives to her; and then she may assist you materially."

"I shall not mind telling her," said Blanch. "I am sure she will help me."

"Another thing, too, I advise," said Mr. Mowbray. "Tell that clever girl who shares your room—Margaret what's her name?—all about it."

"Margaret Grant!" exclaimed Blanch. "I do not think I could!"

"If you share the same room, and she is the superior person in intellect and attainments you described her, you had much better. Don't you see, you could get great advantage from talking on such subjects to one who is enthusiastic about them? and *she* will like you better from being interested in the sort of thing at all."

"Well, I suppose it is best!" said Blanch. "I will do it!"

"That is right, child," said Mr. Mowbray, approvingly. "I will give you a book or two that will be of use, I think. Money, you know, I have not to give; but is there not some sacrifice you could make for Arthur's *present* wants? some luxury you could deny *yourself*, as a sort, of earnest and pledge *to yourself* that you are really determined in your present course?"

"What *could* I give up?" said Blanch, looking inquiringly at him. "I do not know what there is that I could do without, that would help him. I have no luxuries, I think!"

"A luxury is what is *not* a necessary of life," said Mr. Mowbray, rather shortly; "and some luxuries are expensive *in themselves*, besides the first cost. Pet animals, for instance!" and he looked at Nero.

"Oh! dear Uncle!" cried poor Blanch. "You do not mean Nero, poor Nero! What should I do without Nero? No, I don't mean that!" she continued as fast as possible, seeing Mr. Mowbray looking rather shocked. "Of course I could do without him quite well, in such a home, with brothers and sisters and all. But is it really needful to make such a sacrifice? Would it do good?"

"I am only suggesting, Blanch," said Mr. Mowbray. "You must do fully and freely as you think best; but remember, nothing very great or good is or can be attained in this world without sacrificing something for it. You cannot be at a loss for many a word of high authority for this. *This* is 'counting the cost'; *this* is 'not offering that which costs you nothing'; if you give up what you don't care about, it is small merit; but if you give up what you do really care for—"

Mr. Mowbray stopped short, for he was actually afraid of his gruff voice getting tremulous, as he caught sight of the expression of face with which Blanch gazed at her four-footed friend, who, in his turn, after one earnest look with his large bright eyes into her face, bent his great head forward and thrust his nose into her hand.

"Don't, Nero!" exclaimed Blanch. "Quiet, sir!" then thinking she had spoken sharply, she flung

her arms round the dog's neck for a moment, and something very like a tear twinkled in her eye. "Do you mean that I must *sell* *Nero*, Uncle?" she said in a low, clear, distinct tone, as if striving to make up her mind while she spoke.

"There is no *must* in the case, dear child," replied Mr. Mowbray. "I only mean to remind you, as you have come to consult me what I think you *can* do to assist your brother, that you have hitherto been indulged in keeping an animal who adds something, however little, to the daily expense of such a household as your father's, and by selling whom you could obtain enough money to fit Arthur out with a couple of suits of clothes."

"Could I really?" said Blanch; "but I do suppose I might, for George told me he had been offered fourteen pounds for Nero's twin-brother. I will do it, Uncle. I hope I shall do it cheerfully, and not grudge it after," she added very humbly. "I *think* I shall not."

They talked a little longer, and Blanch told Mr. Mowbray how she knew she should have no difficulty in meeting with a purchaser for Nero, for Margaret Grant was rich, and was indulged by her old uncle in every whim which could make her rather lonely home more cheerful; and she had often told Blanch how she longed for such a dog as she described her Nero, and that she would give a great deal to get one. "Ah! but *Nero* is not to be bought!" Blanch had always ended with, perhaps with a little triumph in the tone, for which, it may be, she was now to be punished.

Blanch and Nero had a very still and quiet walk home; no bounding down the thymy hills now; but a grave sad weight was on Blanch's heart; and yet not sad either, for mind and heart were bent on a good object, and she felt a throb of

pleasure when she thought of pouring the money into Arthur's hand. She went straight to her father and told him of her plan, begging him, however, not to speak of it before the children till it was actually all settled.

Mr. Mostyn was much pleased with Blanch, and evidently felt it was right under all the circumstances to part with the dog.

Blanch determined to write the letter that night. She discovered, on examining herself on the subject in the silence of her own chamber, that there was an additional pang to her feelings in the notion that Margaret Grant, rather than a stranger, should become the owner of Nero. She rebuked herself sharply for the feeling the moment she became aware of its existence. She felt it was very wrong not to be *glad* that one, who she knew would appreciate him and treat him kindly, should possess him; but yet she could not say that she felt so; and it was with a sort of pride at thus punishing herself to the utmost that she sat down to write to Margaret. Her letter was short and perhaps a little stiff, but very straightforward.

"MY DEAR MARGARET,

"You will be surprised at receiving a letter from me; and I am not quite sure where you are now, but I will direct to the Archdeacon's. Circumstances have occurred (which I will explain to you when we meet) which make me wish to sell my large dog—as good a one as anybody ever had. I remember you said you wished to buy one, and therefore I write first to offer him to you. The price is fourteen pounds. That was offered for Nero's brother, and therefore I have fixed to keep to that price. If you really wish to have him, he shall be sent by train as soon as I receive your directions about it. I suppose we shall meet at

Mrs. Seagrave's on the 11th ; and now I will conclude my letter, begging you to believe me,

"Very sincerely yours,

"BLANCH MOSTYN.

"P.S.—Do not scruple to tell me if you have changed your mind."

Two or three posts elapsed before Blanch received any answer.

"What *can* make you so anxious for the post, Blanch?" inquired Carrie once or twice, as Blanch could not restrain a slight fidgetiness when the letters were expected.

"I am expecting a letter, certainly," she replied in a light tone, "but I am sorry I *seem* so impatient!"

"No, not impatient exactly," said Carrie. "Only you turn first red and then pale, and look so anxious, you frighten me!"

"There is no need," said Blanch; and at that moment her father came in with the letters, and handed her one. It contained a few lines from Margaret, thanking her for remembering her wish, and assuring her she should be delighted to possess Nero. The rest of the letter was filled up by directions for his journey; and an order on a London banker for fourteen pounds was enclosed. Blanch's heart bounded with mingled joy and sorrow. She begged her father to come out in the garden with her, and showed him her money, and then begged the old pony-carriage (which Arthur so disrespectfully called the rattle-trap) might take her and Arthur that afternoon to Winchester. "And let poor Nero go by the carrier, please, papa," said Blanch, "and then he will be gone before we come back!"

So Blanch went with Arthur to Winchester, and by the way she unfolded her plan to the astonished

boy, and giving him a £5. note for his school expenses, subscriptions, and pocket-money, told him that he should be measured for a new suit of clothes that very afternoon, and in what way she had obtained the money for him. Arthur was deeply touched by his sister's generosity, but *bit-terly* grieved at the loss of Nero, although he was at the same time sincerely grateful for the removal of what had been to him the cause of real discomfort in his school life.

Blanch dreaded not a little having to tell the "intermediates," as Arthur called Carrie, Emma, Alice, and Ann, of the departure of their well-beloved four-footed playfellow, when she got home; and to soften the trouble in some measure, she bought a pair of canary-birds for Carrie and Emma. When she came home, Blanch deposited her cage in the school-room, and went at once in search of Carrie. She could not find her anywhere, and was puzzled as to what could have become of her, until she at last bethought herself of looking in the root-house in their garden. There she found Emma with a very doleful countenance, and the roll of MS. copy-books in her hand, and Carrie sitting in a wheelbarrow, sobbing audibly. Blanch was a good deal alarmed at first, and not a little relieved when she found that the cause of grief was merely the affecting description of the death of Imogene, in their own story, read aloud by Emma so pitifully as to harrow both their hearts.

Very cautiously did Blanch proceed to relate her news, but Carrie and Emma both admired her so very much for giving up her dog for such a purpose, and thought it would make "*so pretty a story,*" and Alice and Ann were so delighted with the canary-birds, that on the whole the separation from Nero was borne more philosophically than Blanch had dared to expect. Aubrey alone roared

lustily on the occasion, nor could he be pacified by the assurances and explanations Emma copiously gave him, of the use Nero's money would be in getting Arthur new clothes.

"What for Arthur no get clothes, and keep Nero?" was the only reply he would vouchsafe to it all; nor was he at all quieted till Blanch carried him off to her own room to try the merits of some sugar-plums of a new kind, that morning imported from Winchester.

"He is come! oh, Blanch, he is come!" cried Carrie and Emma simultaneously, as they rushed into Blanch's room a few days after.

"Oh, such a strange-looking, awkward, uncouth creature!" sighed Carrie.

"So rough," said Emma; "and with such an odious, *odious* squeaky voice!"

"But who is it?" inquired Blanch, as soon as she was allowed to speak.

"Morgan Arthur Macdonald," said Carrie, with a ludicrous imitation of the manner in which the new pupil pronounced his own name, which sent Emma into fits of laughter, and provoked a grave rebuke and exhortation from Blanch.

After a very serious conversation, about the necessity of their being very sedate and careful in their behaviour before this new inmate, Blanch went down with her sisters to tea; but it must be confessed that her gravity could hardly stand his first appearance, or allow her to make a tolerably courteous return to the very low bow with which he honoured her.

"Morgan Arthur," or as the children immediately named him, "Morgiana," was very tall, and particularly ungraceful in his movements; he had red hair, rather a wide mouth, small twinkling eyes, and particularly large hands, which he had a way of balancing in front of him, as if they were

loose at the wrists, or, at best, only fastened there with a large hook and eye. When he spoke, it was in a peculiarly high-pitched voice, and with a strong Scotch accent; and the few remarks he ventured to make, expressed great surprise at all he saw around him. Mr. Mostyn looked very grave, and quite oppressed by this strange addition to his family circle. Mrs. Mostyn was evidently not a little uncomfortable, from her extreme anxiety about the children all behaving well; the elder ones sat stiffly and silently on their chairs; the younger ones giggled; and altogether, Blanch began seriously to doubt the wisdom of the step that her father had taken.

After a long silence, Mrs. Mostyn expressed a hope the stranger would find his room comfortable. "Ah, it's all very weel," he replied; "and a pretty prospect, too; but it's rather close to the nursery."

"You are not used to children, perhaps," said Mrs. Mostyn; "but Aubrey is getting a big boy now, and Anne has almost left off being a nursery-child; so I hope you will not find them much annoyance."

"Oh, I can put up with them very weel, no doubt, Ma'am," said Morgan, with a sort of bow to Mrs. Mostyn, evidently thinking he had made a very polite speech; while she contemplated him, much as an elderly hen would gaze if a dog had suddenly appeared in the midst of her chickens, and immediately told Aubrey to go up stairs, and the rest (who had remained longer than usual round the tea-table, for the amusement of gaping at the stranger,) to disperse to their usual employments.

"Shall I carry you up stairs, young gentleman?" said Morgan to little Aubrey, by way of making friends; to which Aubrey, who always enjoyed getting grown-up people into his service, and was

a thorough little domestic tyrant in the family, concisely replied, "'Es, you s'all.'" So Morgan, taking him up "pick-a-back," began to run up towards the nursery with him; but not being a native of the house, and therefore unaccustomed to the slippery polished stairs, he fell prostrate at the top of the first flight, and slid down to the bottom with a noise like thunder; and Aubrey, though perfectly unhurt, screamed frantically, while the whole family rushed to the bottom of the stairs—an attention which Morgan appeared to take entirely as bestowed on himself, comforting them with repeated assurances that he was "not much bruised." Poor Mrs. Mostyn could hardly hold up her head the rest of the evening, from the intense headache which the sudden fright had brought on; but sleep, even when she went to bed, was impossible, for she was half smothered by the smell of a very bad cigar, in which Morgan, who had the room over hers, was indulging. "That dreadful boy!" said Mrs. Mostyn to herself. "I dare say he is setting the curtains on fire, or something, this very moment! I know I shall never have a day's peace while he is in the house; no, never!"

Next morning, Mr. Mostyn extracted a solemn promise from his pupil, that he would never smoke except in the garden, and there only once a day.

"What do you think of him, papa?" inquired Blanch the next morning, as she found her father gazing out of the window at Morgan, who was pacing up and down the garden, with a book in his hand. "I have been longing to ask you ever since he came into the house, and have never had an opportunity till now."

"Think of him, child?" said Mr. Mostyn. "Why, I think he is a very curious specimen in natural history of a genus I never studied before,

and I shall be some time making him out; but there's good stuff in him, too; he'll make a scholar some day, and is before most young men in Greek now. He seems to have a turn for natural history, too; he has bewitched Charlie, and Alfred also, with some stories about a pet squirrel and an otter that he had. But what is he about now?"

He might well ask; for Morgan had thrown his book on the grass, crouched his tall form into a low bent position, and with his large hands resting open on his knees, was gazing intently at a hole in the low stone wall which surrounded the old well in the rectory garden. "Let us ask him what he has discovered there," said Mr. Mostyn, stepping out of the low window, and giving a hand to Blanch; and then advancing gently towards Morgan, he asked him if there was any curiosity to be seen in the old wall.

"A nest, sir; a nest, I'm certain!" exclaimed the youth eagerly. "I saw a blue-bonnet go in, and it has not come out again yet; just into that long narrow hole below the first row of stones."

"A blue-bonnet?" inquired Blanch.

"He means a tomtit," said her father; "and very pretty little fellows they are."

"The hole goes so far back, I cannot weel reach the eggs," continued Morgan; "but when the young are hatched, the mother won't leave them, and then I can enlarge the hole; perhaps, Miss Blanch," he added, looking up timidly in Blanch's face, "you might fancy me to tame you one of the little birds. I can make him so very, very tame, he would come creeping up your gown, and sit on your shoulder."

By degrees Morgan's peculiar talents developed themselves. There were few nests now to be found, as it was so late in the summer, that the birds had left off building except in cases where

their first brood had been disturbed ; but such as there were he discovered, and won all the children's hearts by showing them where they were. He caught a field-mouse, and succeeded in taming it for little Annie. He bought a magpie at a cottage, which some boys had reared, and soon made it so wonderfully tame, that, one wing being clipped, it would follow him all about the garden, and sit watching for his coming in the fork of a large laurel bush, always announcing its pleasure at sight of its master by a loud cry several times repeated. "Margate" (for that was the bird's name) always came when she was called, progressing very fast down the gravel walk in a series of long side-way hops, and muttering all kinds of odd little sounds, which the children interpreted into words, though Morgan stoutly resisted Alfred's proposal of slitting her tongue with a shilling, to make her talk plainer.

There was certainly something rather taking about Morgan, in spite of his ugliness and awkwardness, and even of the provoking scrapes he was always getting into. He could be perfectly depended upon, when once he *promised*, at Mr. Mostyn's especial request, not to do a thing ; but the things he did do by way of amusement, were so extraordinary, it was utterly impossible to guess at or provide against them, till they had actually happened. Fishing was one of his most innocent amusements, and little harm ensued from that in a general way, except that Mrs. Mostyn's carpets suffered considerably in their appearance, from the black muddy boots in which he regularly returned.

"Blanch," said Mr. Mostyn, next time they were alone together, "I wish you would find that poor boy some reasonable employment. You talk of laying out a new garden for yourself on the lawn, now that the artichoke-bed has swallowed up your

old childish domain ; and I am sure Morgan would be too happy to do all the hard work for you, and it might *perhaps* keep him out of mischief."

So Blanch formally engaged Morgan as her gardening assistant. And they planned and measured, and drew out a very pretty little garden in the turf, with a Maltese Cross in the centre, and a waving narrow bed, like the ribbon of some order, surrounding it in a circle a little way off, and according well with the irregularities of the sloping bank on which it was cut out. The measuring and cutting out, and wheeling away the turf to a distant part of the kitchen-garden, where Carrie and Emma were constructing a "terrace," took up a good many days ; and digging and preparing the borders thoroughly, took a good many more ; and Mr. Mostyn congratulated himself not a little on his scheme having answered so well, and gave the industrious labourer his due meed of praise. On the tenth day, however, Morgan was missing. Breakfast, dinner, and tea, passed without any tidings of him ; and the whole house was seriously uneasy. Nothing was known of him, but that the housemaid had seen him walk quietly out of the front-door about six o'clock that morning. "And he has not even taken his rod with him!" cried his faithful adherent, Charlie, in a tone of great despair.

About half-past seven in the evening a shout proclaimed Morgan's approach ; and in he came, dusty, weary, pale, and foot-sore, with a large basket of verbenas in his hand, which he deposited before Blanch.

"Oh, Mr. Macdonald !" said Mrs. Mostyn, "how could you make us all so uncomfortable, and stay away all day without even informing my husband about it ?"

"I forgot, I quite forgot !" cried Morgan, look-

ing very rueful, for he knew it must be a bad case indeed, when *Mrs.* Mostyn began finding fault. "I quite forgot; I ought to have asked leave. But Miss Blanch said she liked scarlet verbenas; and I heard there was a nursery-garden at Southampton, so I walked there and back, only I lost my way, and came round by Winchester."

"By Winchester!" exclaimed Blanch. "How tired you must be! Why, you must have walked twenty miles!"

"I dare say it was twenty," said Morgan. "But I have got the plants, and we can set them tomorrow; and so it is all very weel, if the minister is not angry with me. You said I might help Miss Blanch in the garden, you know, sir," he added, with an appealing glance at Mr. Mostyn, whom he generally called "the minister," with a peculiar Scotch intonation of the word.

"I did, certainly, my dear fellow," replied Mr. Mostyn. "I cannot deny it. But I think, in future, I must limit your walks to ten miles, or thereabouts, if you please; and we should be less uneasy, if you would always tell us when you mean to be out longer than usual."

"Certainly I will," replied Morgan meekly, and very thankful to escape so easily.





CHAPTER V.

MARGARET'S STUDIO.

AND now, while Blanch was useful and beloved in her own home, let us turn and take a glance at Margaret in hers. Margaret was beloved at home, but certainly *not* useful: so far as the lives of these young girls had hitherto been passed, it seemed as if Blanch had been born to minister, and Margaret to be ministered to.

Margaret's home was a fine old red brick house standing in a small park, about ten miles from a sleepy, quiet, cathedral town. It was built upon elevated ground, and overlooked a wide level country; and there was a garden terrace, where rows of hollyhocks grew, which commanded a view of the sea, and whence one could see, on a fine day, the break of the waves seven miles off, and the glitter of white sails where the sun touched them. It was a beautiful and desirable old house, and had a flat roof, safe for walking on; and there, when Margaret was a child, she had often come with her nurse, and looked down into the tops of the elm-trees (which were grouped near the house on the south side,) and watched the mother rooks feeding their young, for she could look down into the nests, and count the eggs. It was a quiet and happy home to Margaret, though

to many young people of her age it would have appeared inexpressibly dull; for almost all its visitors were grave clergymen, and though the Archdeacon was very hospitable to this particular class of visitors, he considered himself far too old to enter into general society, and accordingly Margaret was growing up in a state of considerable isolation.

Margaret reached home at about eleven o'clock on a glorious August morning, having slept at the cathedral town, and when she had greeted the old servants, some of whom were little younger and much more infirm than her uncle, she rushed up to her room, and hastily took off her walking dress, for she had learned to be more independent of her nurse than formerly, much to that personage's anger and disappointment. She then ran up another flight of stairs, into a long corridor, at the end of which, and screened off by a curtain, was a third flight of steps, very narrow, very steep, and somewhat dark; Margaret dashed up them with the eagerness of a mother going to her child; they led to a door, only one door, it was of oak, and had a heavy branched lock upon it; she turned the key, and ran into the room within, with a beating heart of exultation and delight. It was her own room that she had entered, her study, her estate, her property, her world.

It was about thirty feet long, and eight feet high; had a casement at either end, and a space of gloomy shadow in the middle; its southern end was flooded with sunshine now; and Margaret hastened to open the casement, for being just under the leaden roof, this study of hers was of tropical temperature. Ivy was climbing almost all over this casement; and the rugged floor and yellow-washed walls were besprinkled with shadows of ivy leaves: close to the window stood a

table, the only piece of furniture, excepting a wooden chair, that the place afforded. And the floor! who shall describe the heterogeneous mass of property which the sun was then shining upon, as it lay on the floor of Margaret's study! There were piles of books, dusky, old, unbound, and in some cases ragged: there were tools, a real saw, and multitudes of little graving tools of different sorts, lying among sawdust; for Margaret was learning wood-carving: there were likewise half-finished specimens of her carving lying about the room, also reposing on sawdust; for she had left this den in a state of disorder, and given strict orders that it should not be touched till her return.

A little further, where the shade gave them a softened melancholy look, were numerous busts from the antique; plaster casts of pillars, of tombs, of animals, all piled in disorder, with the men's and women's heads on the top, and a layer of dust among the hair and the raiment of each, which gave them the peculiar satin-like softness so much admired by connoisseurs. Margaret had been drawing from the casts, and the unfinished head of a Hebe was still on the easel; and Margaret had been modelling in clay; and there was a board with a highly creditable Medusa's head upon it, only waiting till the power should come to finish it.

Farther on, there were various maps and plans on the walls, these she had drawn herself; and there were geological specimens on the floor—ammonites, large leg-bones of animals, that she had dug out of the Suffolk crag; and large collections of stones, with scales, bits of shell, and bits of wood, protruding from them; and all kinds of treasures from the blue lias of Dorsetshire.

This might have been thought enough for one room; but no, under the north window was another

pile of books, and on the floor of one side was a collection of birds' nests, and on the other side stood a harp, Margaret's favourite instrument. Most of its strings were broken, and it was quite unfit for playing upon at that time, such being always the case with harps unless they belong to heroines in certain books. If Margaret had been such a heroine, she would have found her harp in perfect tune, have instantly flung her arms around it, and drawn from it strains of most delicious melody ; but she was not ; consequently she did not feel aggrieved, though she knew it would cost nearly two hours of trouble to string it and put it in tune again.

Margaret, as we said before, opened the casement ; and then she turned and gazed down the long narrow apartment, and drew a deep breath, and took some exulting turns from window to window ; and then she sat down on her wooden chair, and leaned her elbows on the table, and began to think. Her desk was on the table, full of foolscap paper, for she loved to write upon a large page.

"It is quite true," thought Margaret ; "Blanch was right. She said my talents would come to nothing, if the objects I strove for were always changing. There is my Hebe, how enthusiastic I was about *her*, and yet after I thought of beginning to carve, and saw Miss Mitchell's roses that she had done, I forgot the Hebe, and all I could do was nothing ; and the wood-carving became quite a passion with me, till I had nearly finished my bunch of grapes, and my Sancho Panza. Now I do not care for it particularly ; I care about writing, and writing only. What a pity it is."

Yes, it was a great pity, and Margaret's reflections were salutary on the subject ; but she had not continued them long, when her nurse knocked

at the door and told her luncheon was ready. "And, Miss Grant, dear," proceeded the nurse, "you wouldn't mind the room being cleaned up a bit, would you?"

"What do you want to clean it for?" said Margaret ruefully; "it does very well."

"It's covered with chips and shavings and all manner of dirt," said the old woman; "and it *looks so*, to see a young lady with chips fringing her petticoats."

"Well," Margaret began, "if you would take care not to touch my casts."

"Not dust the images!" said the nurse mournfully.

"No, not one of them!" cried Margaret.

The nurse mused. "There was an Italian man here," she said, "with the beautifullest images that ever I see, only half an hour since: he had two cats that shook their heads, and pitchers just like washing-pitchers, only it would be awkward to pour anything out of them; and some girls dancing that were as natural as could be, Miss, only their petticoats were so scanty, it seemed a wonder how they could any ways jump so high in them. If you did not mind having some clean images instead of these?"

"Clean images!" cried Margaret, her eyes sparkling with anger and alarm.

"Well, well, Miss," said the old woman soothingly; "it's just as people think. I thought you might like some new ones; and me and Mrs. Green was thinking of clearing away these *cracked* ones, and getting some new ones for a surprise, Miss, while you were at luncheon. The Italian man isn't out of the gates yet; we could very easy fetch him back." This was added in a persuasive tone.

"Don't think of such a thing, nurse; it was

very kind of you and Green to wish to please me ; but you could not annoy me more, than by meddling with any of my things."

"Very well, ma'am," said the nurse shortly ; "then I'll pick your gown over before you go down." So Margaret stood still while the fringe of chips was cleared away ; and then, as a great concession, she gave leave for the cleaning of the floor, so far as removing the chips, sawdust, and other *kindling* (as the nurse disrespectfully called it) was concerned, meaning by that expressive word, something fit to light fires with.

She went down to luncheon, and found the Archdeacon with a letter in his hand. "Well, child," he remarked, "what do you think is going to happen ? Who do you think is coming here ?"

"The Bishop," said Margaret promptly ; for the Bishop was the only visitor of importance that she ever saw.

"No, child. Look here, look at this letter."

"An Indian letter !" cried Margaret. "What ! do you mean to say, Uncle, that Gerard is coming over ; Cousin Gerard Grant ?"

"Even so," replied the old gentleman, twinkling his black eyes and rubbing his hands ; "got two years' leave, after his illness ; packed up his traps ; sold his horses ; going to make my house his headquarters ; be here, he says, almost so soon as his letter."

"It's more than ten years since I saw him," said Margaret, musing ; "and oh, how he used to tease me !"

"How old is he now, Pussy ?" asked the old man ; "it's not that my memory fails, but I never could remember young people's ages."

"He will be seven-and-twenty when I am seventeen," said Margaret, "and that will be at Christmas."

"Indeed," said the Archdeacon. "Well, so long as he does not turn the house topsy-turvy, I shall be glad to see him, very glad; quite a grown-up man, I declare."

A grown-up man! Margaret looked amazed; he was already an old bachelor in her estimation.

"Ring the bell," continued her uncle; "and let a room be got ready for him; he may be here any day or hour. Seven-and-twenty; bless me!"

"He is only six-and-twenty at present, Uncle."

"Young people shoot up like mushrooms now-a-days. Green (to the housekeeper, who then entered)—Green, Mr. Gerard is coming home, coming directly, and I wish a room to be prepared for him, and one for his man; let me see; oh, here it is: 'I shall bring my black fellow with me, but he will sleep at my door;' that is what Mr. Grant says."

Mrs. Green had been so aghast at hearing of this sudden return, that she gasped and said nothing; but when the idea of the dark foreigner sleeping in the passage presented itself to her mind, she said faintly, "Bless us! will *Master* Gerard bring a Sambo with him, sir? one of they poor creatures that throws themselves under Jug-ganot's car every year?"

"So it seems, Mrs. Green; and you will please to prepare for him."

"I expect he won't like our ways," said the old housekeeper, ruefully, not thinking of the master, but the man. "I've heard say that some of them folks eat their meat raw!"

This old domestic being more than ten years younger than her master, he, of course, did not consider her to be at all past her work, though to the impartial world she appeared rather childish.

"You had better cook some rice for him," said Margaret; "and he can have a melon."

"Melon!" repeated the housekeeper. "O deary me; servants eating melons, ma'am! I expect there must be another frame then!" and then looking forlornly round, and receiving no further order, the old body withdrew, and began her preparations in a very weak and tearful frame of mind.

All the rest of the day the uncle was in a very restless and fidgety state; he had dinner put off, he waited a long time for his tea, he had prayers an hour after the usual time, and at last, as he kissed Margaret when she retired to rest, he said, "Well, Pussy, I hope this young man won't disturb me, and make a noise in the house; for I'm getting rather old—I'm getting decidedly old."

Margaret replied that she hoped Gerard would be agreeable and affectionate; his letters were always a treat to his uncle, and she hoped his presence would be. Having thus done her duty, she shut herself up, and began seriously to regret the coming of this said second-cousin, whom she remembered a wild daring boy, noisy and energetic, and the plague of her little life when she was a child.

She fell asleep, and no vision of black servants haunted her slumbers. It was a lovely summer's night, and though her window was open, she was not awakened by the sound about midnight of carriage wheels grating on the gravel.

At the usual hour the next morning she was called, and greeted by the nurse with the tidings that Mr. Grant had arrived, and that his black servant was then coming up stairs with his master's boots.

Margaret felt annoyed; but she rose more quickly than usual, for she did not wish their guest to be down stairs before her. "So pleasant as I expected home to be," she thought, "and so

much as I expected to enjoy myself up in my room ; and now all the country round will be calling on Gerard, and there will never be any peace."

She went down stairs, feeling excessively shy and awkward. A gentleman was standing with his back to her, talking to her uncle.

"Here is Margaret," said the Archdeacon. "Of course you remember Margaret, my dear Gerard."

The gentleman turned rather leisurely, and confronted her. "What! Margaret!" he said, in a tone of great amusement. "Is this little Margaret?" and he seemed in the first moment of her approach to have intended to stoop and kiss her forehead; but as if thinking better of it, he held out his hand and bowed.

Margaret had nothing to say ; this was not the Gerard of her recollection ; she saw before her a gentleman-like young man, slightly languid in manner, but with eager eyes of the darkest grey, so dark that at a little distance they looked black. His eyebrows were thick and black, his whiskers dark, and his hair light ; his complexion would have been pale, but that travel in hot countries had darkened without precisely sun-browning it. He was very little above the middle height, but had a graceful figure, and such a general air of ease, and almost of languor, as made his earnest eyes look as if they had monopolized all the spirit and vehemence that remained to him for themselves.

They sat down to breakfast, and Margaret was very glad that her occupation as tea-maker made her silence appear less awkward ; her cousin's calm easy manner, no less than his penetrating eyes, were trying to her ; and as he looked about him, at the eatables upon the table, at the furniture, and at the servant whenever he entered, it never occurred to her that his musing smile of ob-

servation was owing to the length of time which had elapsed since he had tasted hot rolls and cool creamy butter, and the usual items of an English breakfast-table, since a white man had brought him his letters, and since he had set his feet upon a Turkey carpet. Now and then he looked at Margaret, and still it was with the same quiet musing smile. "Polly," he said at length, using the pet name of her infancy, "do you still love to make dirt pies?"

"Yes," answered Margaret, demurely.

The Archdeacon looked up surprised. Gerard laughed. "Don't you remember, Sir," he said, addressing him, "what a passion I used to have for modelling in clay? Well, Polly used to get pieces of my clay whenever she could, and make pies of it, and stick it all over with ripe barberries."

"I made a model of a Medusa," said Margaret, "before I went to school, but I could not do the hair to my mind."

"Could not make it snakey enough, eh, Polly?" asked Gerard, with some interest.

"No, it was not that," replied Margaret; "the snakes were real snakes, *only* snakes; far too like mere specimens of the tribe; and I could not impart any of those ideal horrors to them without which the model had no merit."

"Exactly so, Polly; without which it must be only a dirt pie after all! You should see some of the water-snakes of the East; slimy brutes that they are; slinking about a boat with their heads out of water, and their ugly lower jaws hanging open; they would give you some ideas for your Medusa; they have such a hideous leer in their wicked eyes."

The Archdeacon could not exactly make out what his niece and nephew were talking about; and perhaps that was the reason why at that mo-

ment he announced that, breakfast being over, he should ring for family prayers. He thus effectually stopped the discussion on dirt pies for a time; and when prayers were over, Gerard, who remembered some of the old servants, went up to speak to them; and Margaret feeling her shy fit return, slipped out of the room, and ran up to her studio. *Her* own, she called it; but no sooner had she entered, than she remembered with dismay that this of old had been Gerard's garret, *his* studio, the place where he kept his chemicals, and where he carpentered and modelled. Terrible recollection! Her eyes filled with tears at the bare thought of giving up her study. "Not one quiet hour have I had in it yet," she exclaimed aloud; "and now, very likely, he will want to have it back again; but at least I will have it this one morning, without caring how he amuses himself!" and so saying, she took down a volume of Froissart's Chronicle, in the original Norman French, and began to read with intense earnestness and interest. Nor did she notice the flight of time, till she heard a step on the stairs, and thought her nurse was come to call her down to luncheon.

"I wonder (she said to herself) whether Gerard will notice that I have been absent, and ask where I have been; if he should, I shall tell him; calling this place *my own*, of course. I dare say he will not remember it, though; and if he does, I will not give it up without a struggle."

The steps came on, and the door was opened; it was Gerard. His deep eyes encountered hers, and his first look was one of surprise. "*You* here, Margaret!" Margaret made no answer. Gerard paced the room from end to end, and when he came up to her again, he said, as if amused, "*What are* you doing, Polly, in this dusty hole?"

"This is where I spend my mornings when I am

at home," she replied ; and the words "*You* here," sounded still in her ears rather painfully ; they had seemed to imply that Gerard still considered the place as his own, and had thought a good deal about it ; indeed, his very early visit to this old haunt was proof enough of itself. Gerard had sauntered to the Medusa.

"Ah, very good indeed," he said ; "but the snakes, as you say, Polly, are mere adders ; that is why you have broken some of them off, I suppose."

"Yes," said Margaret, still feeling very cross.

"But I like the features," he continued ; "you have not fallen into the error of taking all feminine softness from the expression ; there is still grace, and a sort of piteous heartfelt isolation betrayed in the countenance."

"I tried to give it that look," said Margaret, "because I thought it roused more painful feelings ; when you see beauty and wickedness in one person, you are more excited both to displeasure and to fear, than when ugliness and wickedness come together ; the snakey hair itself too would not be half so hateful on a man's head as on a woman's."

"Very true, Polly," said Gerard, who had already taken a lump of clay in his hand, and was looking about him for some water. "And you have been able to convey feminine beauty, and have failed with the terrible and loathsome part of the business ; one reason I think is, that your snakes are too large, they look almost like sausages !"

Margaret laughed in spite of herself.

"And another reason is, that you have done away with the hair altogether. Now I would have locks of hair, real hair, wavy and silky, and snakes should nestle and hiss in it and among it. If a fellow only stands a little way off from your Me-

dusa, he is safe from the snakes; but my idea of carrying out the spirit of the ancient and most horrid conception, would be to make some of them loose! They should be small wormy-looking serpents, and should look as if they could slip out of their tangled meshes of hair at any moment!" So saying, he began to model a thing so like a venomous worm in his hands, that Margaret started back. "Start, Polly!" he exclaimed with a laugh; "you could not pay a higher compliment to my snake. Now, I think between us we can make this thing, this creature, this woman, truly frightful and demon-like, with the dark desolate brows, the sweet misery of her lips, and this soft glance of hers that means mischief."

Margaret looked on, well enough pleased to see her idea carried out; but Gerard broke off from his task to go and look at the ivy leaves. "Ivy!" he said, with a strange smile of interest. "I have not seen ivy for years. How pretty the shadows of the leaves are upon the wall! And so," he continued, stamping on the flecks of sunshine that lay confusedly on the rugged floor, "so these are what you call sunbeams? Margaret you should see the fierceness of our eastern sun, so different to this pale dim moony stuff; only think of looking this sun in the face at mid-day, and knowing it is the same that one is so terribly afraid of out there, so afraid, that one gets up in pitch darkness to take a cool ride before he comes; and lo! while one boot is half on, some beams as red as rust spirt up to your ceiling through the jalousies, he is just arrived, and before your other boot is fairly on, the room is gorgeous with daylight, and every atom of gilding or metal in it glitters again. You go down and mount, and the lazy dogs in the dust are already creeping into the shadows, and you are glad the shadows are long; and the water that

has been thrown about to lay the powdery dust by your door, begins to steam up as if it boiled; and the plumage of the glossy black crows sitting on your verandah, is so dazzling, that you can hardly look at it; and you—why, you wish you were in England!"

"I should like to see the wonderful East," said Margaret.

"Ah, Polly; but the wonderful East tortures a man from the north, if he enters into the philosophy of it; it is terrible to know that among all the millions you encounter, there is no belief in greatness, no aspiration, no sense of honour, no public spirit, no disinterestedness, and no understanding such a thing when shown to them."

"Only patience," observed Margaret; "some of the eastern races are patient."

"Yes, they have plenty of patience; bad luck to it!" replied Gerard, laughing. "I really must take another lump of clay; I find it fascinating work, this moulding and model making."

"I am glad Gerard is not distant and stiff to me," thought Margaret; "he seems to understand that I like to hear him talk; that may be perhaps because I have so often written to him."

"Will that do, Polly?" asked Gerard, laying a roughly-formed model of a snake on the dim brows of the Medusa.

"Yes, it is the very essence of snake," said Margaret.

Gerard took some more clay and went on, with his leisurely hand and eager eyes; at last he said coolly, "This is just the place for a daguerreotype room, and there is a dark closet in the corner, which seems as if it had been built on purpose."

Margaret took fright at once. "O there are several other places in the house that would do

quite as well," she began, in a tone of vexation; "and besides—"

Her vehemence, and her stopping short with a sudden effort, seemed to surprise Gerard, who looked at her with a quiet smile. She had turned half away from him, and her flashing eyes were, or appeared to be, intent on her Medusa.

"Besides what?" asked Gerard, putting his clay down, and standing upright. "I wonder what she means," he thought; "here comes the old temper out of its hiding-place. I had almost forgotten what a peppery little child she was. Besides what, Margaret?" he repeated.

"Besides, I don't know whether I can spare the place for such a purpose," exclaimed Margaret, roused again by his pertinacious questioning; "it will be impossible for me to study here with that kind of thing going on also."

"O this is your room now, is it?" said Gerard, quietly putting down his graving tool. "I beg your pardon;" and he began to move towards the door.

Margaret was already heartily ashamed of herself for her display of temper; and she darted to the door before he reached it with his leisurely steps, meaning to stop him, and make some kind of apology.

"Thank you," he said, as if thinking she had intended to open the door because his hands were covered with the clay that he had been kneading. "I hope I have not interrupted you much."

There was neither displeasure nor satire in his eyes; his face was simply rather grave and reflective; and Margaret was so completely vexed and abashed, that instead of saying anything, she actually opened the door for him, and allowed him to pass calmly through. Miserable mistake! How could she have been guilty of such a piece

of rudeness and folly as to be so childish, and so impetuous? How could she ever forgive herself? And besides, when she reflected on what had been said, she could not remember any distinct expression of intending to make the room into a daguerreotyping chamber, Gerard had merely remarked that it would suit very well for that purpose. She stood listening to Gerard's retreating footsteps, and her cheeks flushed with shame, and her eyes were dazzled with angry tears; she was not only angry with herself, but with him, for being so instantly and promptly bent on withdrawing, and for seeming to intimate that he supposed he had been intruding. "It will be some time before he comes here again," thought Margaret. "O I do wish I had been more polite, and could control my feelings better. What would Mrs. Seagrave, what would Blanch, have said, if they could have seen and heard me just now!"

Margaret passed a very uncomfortable half hour, and then she heard steps on the stairs again; this could not be Gerard come again; she half hoped, half dreaded, that it might; no, it was her nurse, come to tell her that luncheon was ready. Margaret went down, hoping to find Gerard alone in the dining-room. "So lately as he came home," she thought, "and so ill as he has been. Really I never felt so much ashamed of myself in my life. How could I be so rude? I *will* apologize." She heard her uncle's voice, and Gerard's deep-toned answer. "Was there really much doing towards evangelizing the natives?" she heard the old Archdeacon saying. "As much as one would be led to expect from published accounts?" "Even that much is marvellously little, considering the vast machinery set in motion," Gerard replied. And then he seemed to reflect, and answered cautiously, as if unwilling to disappoint the Archdeacon.

"The more one mixes with natives and sees their marvellous powers of acting, the more difficult it is to believe in their sincerity. I used to have a native reader to read the Bible to as many of my servants as would listen, and they would walk up stairs to the room where he was to sit, and dispose themselves round it on the floor, so as not to touch each other, and some of them I should think *may* have listened."

This, and a good deal more talk on the same subject, passed through Margaret's ears, without reaching her mind; her hands were busy grating nutmeg, and putting the requisite quantity of port wine into a basin of sago, which was her uncle's usual luncheon, and her thoughts were of the Medusa and her behaviour to Gerard.

"The chaise is ordered at two o'clock," her uncle said; "and mind you are ready, Margaret."

In common with some other very old-fashioned people, the Archdeacon always called his little green brougham his chaise.

"Where are we going, Uncle?" asked Margaret.

"The Bishop writes me word that he has a touch of the gout, and I am going to see him."

Margaret sighed; she did not like being shut up in the dull drawing-room at the palace, to amuse herself with an old cabinet of shells and some books with which she was already familiar, while her uncle and the Bishop talked over the affairs of the diocese in another room. It was an established custom, however, that she should go with her uncle on these expeditions; therefore she went up to dress, and when she came down, neatly and unpretendingly arrayed for the drive, Gerard was not there, and her uncle was chuckling and laughing. "Strange fellow, this Gerard! What do you think he is about now, Margaret?"

Margaret's face expressing a flattering degree

of wonder, the Archdeacon continued, "Why, Pussy, he has brought a tent home with him, a regular Arab's tent! which he used when he was travelling in the east; and he says he wishes to get it pitched on the roof between the gables, that he may enjoy his native air! He and his Hindoo are pitching it now!"

"Rather a hot situation," observed Margaret; "those leads are very much heated at this time of day."

"So I told him, so I told him," replied the old gentleman. "I said, 'My dear boy, you'll be fried; but pray do as you like; make yourself at home, either outside my house or in it'; so they have taken up innumerable pillows and a carpet and some books; and now I hope your cousin is happy."

Margaret felt vexed at this harmless freak of a man who had not yet recovered his activity and energy, after an illness caused by the climate of India. She thought he would not have wished for this tent if he had felt himself free to come and sit in the long upper chamber; and during all the drive with her uncle, she was unusually dull and silent.

There was no opportunity, or she thought there was no opportunity, of speaking to her cousin that evening; he was talking to her uncle, or he was strolling about on the terrace smoking his cigar, or he was up at the top of the house in his tent, where she was told that he had a ship-lamp lighted and swinging from the top. "I will speak to him to-morrow," she thought, "while we are walking to church."

To-morrow came; Margaret awoke early; it was a glorious morning, and she rose at once; she now knew how to dress herself, and she resolved to go down and walk in the shrubbery; the feel-

ing of the air was fresh, though the deep cloudless sky promised a sultry day ; she took her way to the shrubbery, and was surprised as she entered it to hear the stable clock strike six, still more surprised, in a few minutes, to meet Gerard sauntering up to her with a book in his hand.

"I had no idea you would be up so early," she stammered.

"I am accustomed to rise before dawn," Gerard said ; "and now I feel it difficult to lie watching the increase of light through these short summer nights. So *you* are an early riser, Margaret ?"

"This is almost the first time I have been out so early," said Margaret frankly.

"Now I will mention the upper chamber," she thought ; but while she was thinking how to begin, the sound of a distant bell caught the attention of both, and they turned to listen.

"What is that ?" exclaimed Gerard, as a cheerful peal struck up, and came to them softened by distance.

"Don't you remember," replied Margaret, "that the bells always ring here early on Sunday morning ?"

Gerard made no answer ; he was so evidently interested and touched at the sound, that she did not like to interrupt him ; at last, when they paused, he said, "How often have I heard those bells in the desert !"

"Heard them in the desert !" repeated Margaret.

"Ah, Polly," he answered ; "you read a good deal, and you think a good deal, and yet there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy. Ask any man who has journeyed through desolate places, in Arabia, or over the vast still grassy steppes of Asia, and he will tell you that he had heard in their unutterable

silence the sounds and the voices of home. I never met with one yet who had not. I suppose it may be that the ear is so entirely emptied of sound, that we are able to catch, still echoing in it, the faint repetition of sounds that are past. I travelled once over one of those vast grassy expanses with an old fellow, a lieutenant in the navy, who declared that the voice of a parrot which he had once possessed, and which had been dead ten years, sounded so loudly in his ears, that it actually woke him from his sleep; and as for me, sitting alone, my people grouped behind me, and nothing before me but the earth one flood of green, and the heavens one sea of blue, I have heard those very bells, with all their changes, strike up early in the morning, as clearly and as sweetly as I hear them now."

"The ear, then, has its phantoms as well as the eye," said Margaret seriously.

"And, strange to say," remarked Gerard, "when I heard those bells, it was always Sunday morning."

"Did you remember at the time that it *was* Sunday morning, or did the sound of the bells remind you of it?"

Gerard laughed. "Margaret," he said, "the organ of wonder is largely developed in your brain, I am sure! No; I remembered first that it *was* Sunday morning, and then I heard the bells. We are so accustomed to the indescribable peace of an English Sunday, that it is only by being long away where there is no such thing, that this marvel of it strikes one, and, if I may use such an expression, the *poetry* of it. Looking back on it as something exquisite which is departed (as I have heard many fellows do who never stepped over the threshold of a church if they could help it,) I suppose makes some of its

sights and sounds take hold of the imagination; for of all the sounds heard in the desert, none that I know of, are so commonly heard as church bells."

Margaret thought he spoke so heartily, and seemed so completely to have forgotten their little tiff the day before, that it was her best time for reminding him of it. She did so, with a good deal of embarrassment; and when he understood her he smiled, and forgave her in a manner which showed that he exaggerated in his mind the difference of age between them almost as much as she did. He was a man, and had seen the world; she was almost a child, and had seen nothing.





CHAPTER VI.

OUT ON THE ROOF.

“ Sudden the vocal starbeams break
In radiance o'er the night ;
He starts as one but new awake,
Still dreaming of delight.
‘ Man ! though lonely, ne'er alone,
Though far, yet ever nigh :
Know 'twas our light that calmly shone
To still thy troubled eye ;
For each little golden star,
Faint as we are,
And wide and far,
Is to thee as thy guardian-star.’ ”

Impey's translation of Tieck.

GEORGE F. Gerard had been pleased and touched at hearing the church bells, it was no wonder that his feelings were very much excited when, after a quiet walk through the fields beside a small river brimful of water, he attended service at the village church, for the first time since his landing. As they walked home, Margaret saw that he was lost in thought, and would not interrupt him; nor did he speak to her much till after service in the afternoon.

“ After all,” thought Margaret, “ I am really glad Gerard is come; my uncle is pleased to hear him relate his experience of eastern life; and as

for me, he is neither in my way, nor do I seem to be in his now ; he is very friendly, especially since I have spoken to him about that room in the roof."

" Margaret," said Gerard, " who lives in that cottage ?"

Margaret did not know, but before she had time to say so, the archdeacon replied for her. " Old Smith and his wife live there ; the place was damp, but I got a drain made for them, and had some of the willow branches cut away."

" It is a picturesque looking place," observed Gerard. " I like to see a river bed so brimful of water. I declare the yellow flags are nearly up to the neck in it. Margaret, has Tom Blake left the thatched cottage on the other side the cherry orchard ?"

" I don't know," replied Margaret.

" Not know !" exclaimed Gerard. " Why, Polly, the cottage is in my uncle's parish, not a quarter of a mile from home."

" I don't know, notwithstanding," said Margaret, feeling a little vexed. " You know my uncle always visits the sick himself ; he would not trust me to do it, and therefore I don't know any of them."

" I suppose he would not trust you to prune the fruit trees," said Gerard, lightly ; " and yet, Polly, you pay *them* a visit now and then. I am afraid you are a strangely unsociable mortal."

" I am so shy with the poor," said Margaret ; " I don't know what to say to them."

Gerard did not say anything more ; perhaps he reflected that it was not his mission to preach to his young cousin ; but the surprise he had manifested set Margaret thinking, and after the service she would have asked him to help her in getting acquainted with some of the people, if he had not

said he meant to walk home by a certain wood, which lay very much out of the usual path.

"Uncle," she said to the indulgent old man, "should you mind my visiting the poor people sometimes?"

"Mind it? no, child, provided you talk simple English, treat them with proper consideration, and never go at their meal times."

"I wish you had told me before that you would like it," said Margaret.

"I do not like you to do such a thing to please me, and because you are told. Mr. and Mrs. Salter and I visit them constantly, so you need not go to them for their sake, only for your own."

Mrs. Salter was Margaret's former model of millinery.

"Perhaps I might go sometimes with Mrs. Salter," said Margaret, a little hurt at the cool way in which her first offer to help had been received.

"To be sure, Pussy," was the reply; "and I dare say it will be an improvement to you. You know nothing of life at present."

"Of low life," Margaret ventured to say, by way of amendment.

"Well, my dear, thirty-nine fortieths of all life is low life; so take to your Saxon, Pussy; and you have my leave to visit my poor, if you will make up your mind beforehand that it will be to learn more than you teach."

"I wish my uncle would not call me Pussy," thought Margaret; "he always thinks of me as quite a child; and I wish I was like Blanch; she speaks of poor people as if it came naturally to her to go into their cottages, and hear them talk. I am sure *she* does not go only for her own improvement. What a sad thing it is that I should be so different!"

They walked home very slowly, for the afternoon was sultry.

"How hot this side of the house is," said Gerard, when he came in. "One ought not to suffer from heat in England, unless it is one's own fault. I have no doubt that there is a beautiful air now stirring about the roof; and my tent after dinner will be as cool as possible. You should come and pay it a visit, uncle."

"Too high for an old man like me," replied the archdeacon; but he had evidently a curiosity to see the tent; and after a few more objections had been answered, he allowed himself to be conducted up stairs by his nephew as soon as he had dined.

Margaret followed; and as they issued out upon the roof, they all felt the freshness of the air very pleasantly.

"Now, uncle, enter into the humour of the thing, will you?" said Gerard, "and sit in the tent door on these cushions; you will see the first twinkling of the evening star here, as I did last night, and presently a thread-like crescent moon will set in the sea. Sit down, Margaret, and when it grows dusk I will light my lamp and read to you."

Margaret sat down, and felt that she had never so much enjoyed being on the roof before. The mother rooks, intent on rearing their second brood, were sitting with outspread wings on the nests just below her. The scent of roses and of jasmine came freshly up from the garden; the green fields were still spotted with white lambs; and the sea was cool and grey, excepting when the setting moon gilded it a little at the horizon, for the horizon was not very clear, and the moonbeams were as red as sunrise.

Margaret long remembered that evening. There was something free and natural in the kind of

pleasure it afforded that struck her vivid imagination forcibly. She looked about her, and all the surrounding objects seemed to take a new significance. There were the marks made long years ago round the feet of some who had formerly visited the place—such marks as almost every leaden roof exhibits. There was one that had been made round her own foot when she was a child; and there was a little footmark with the date 1702 upon it. That little foot had assuredly now ceased to pace this restless world; but Margaret recalled some of her childish thoughts respecting it as she looked. What a distinct trace it had left behind! She wondered whether its owner, by any one act of his moral life, had left as distinct a witness to his having been, as by this trace he had witnessed of his material life.

She looked beyond the roof. What was very near was shut out from them, they were so much above it: that was well for such an evening, and the heavens seemed all the nearer for the splendour of the weather. Star after star came out, and the heat moderated, and the dusk deepened. At length her thoughts were recalled by something that Gerard said, and she listened as he and the Archdeacon talked on one of those very few subjects which are of like interest and significance to the old and to the young.

There was a little lamp hanging in the tent. Gerard lighted it, and its slender rays illuminated the inside and fell on some books that lay about. Gerard took up one; the Archdeacon had asked him to read. He felt the heat greatly, and did not want to change the freshness of the upper air for his study, with its heavy carpet and close curtains.

The book was a Greek Testament. "I need not apologize for reading this before you, Mar-

garet," he said, "for I think, if I remember rightly, some Greek books of yours were tolerably well thumbed before I left England." So saying, he began to read the death and raising of Lazarus; in S. John's Gospel, beginning, "Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany."

As he proceeded, the narrative, in its original language, touched Margaret's heart as if it had been some new and wonderful story. The heat of the country, the weariness of the journey, the misery of the sisters, and the Redeemer's grief, rose up before her; and as she sat in the tent door, she leant her head within, eager to catch every sound of it. The darkness gathered, and seemed to wrap them in, pressing up to the curtained opening; but the lamp was red and clear within; it shone on her uncle's white head, and illuminated Gerard's speaking features, which seemed to accord well with the deep, abrupt, and rather tremulous, accents of his voice.

Gerard laid down the book when he had finished, with a short quick sigh; one of his auditors was asleep—the venerable white head had sunk among the pillows.

"Let him sleep, Margaret," said Gerard; "it can do no harm such a balmy night as this;" and looking out at the gathering darkness, he began to repeat:

"Night is the time for rest :
How sweet when labours close,
To gather round an aching breast
The curtain of repose.'

Margaret, it is delightful to me to see how much he enjoys the evening time of his life. He has worked very hard, and he already feels a foretaste of rest."

"How fond I used to be of that little poem years ago," said Margaret.

"But the lines I quoted were not your favourites, I should think," said Gerard in a half-bantering tone.

"Which do you think would suit me better?" asked Margaret, flattered that he pretended to some knowledge of her character, and yet hurt at the rallying manner.

Gerard immediately repeated:

"Night is the time to think ;
When from the eye the soul
Takes flight, and on the utmost brink
Of yonder starry pole
Discerns beyond the abyss of night
The dawn of uncreated light.

"Night is the time for toil,
To plough the classic field,
Intent to find the buried spoil
Its wealthy furrows yield ;
Till all is ours that sages taught,
That poets sang, and heroes wrought."

"I am not so ambitious as you think," said Margaret rather mournfully.

"Well, come inside; don't block out the sight of the stars from me by sitting in the tent door. Come in, and I will read you some better verses than those." And so taking up a little volume, well thumbed and quite travel-stained, he read to her "Milton's Hymn on the Nativity." Margaret felt its beauty in her inmost heart, as well as the advantage it derived from the circumstance of being read at such a time and place; the picture it presented was in better keeping with night, and nature, and the stars, than with the lighted and sheltered room below.

"Margaret, did you ever see any 'birds of calm?'" he said, referring to the line,

"While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmèd wave."

"No, of course you never did; you have not been at sea, and Milton never was, I should think; yet how could he better have described the appearance of those delicate white birds that one sees in a calm in the tropics, rocking on the subsiding sea as it gradually sighs itself asleep, till it is as clear and smooth as glass."

"Gerard, Gerard!" said Margaret softly, "you will wake my uncle."

Gerard shaded the lamp with his hand. "He is not at all altered since I left England; and what a good friend he has always been to me! It is so delightful to come home and find him just the same active, simple-minded, benevolent, eccentric old man that I left him."

"Eccentric!" said Margaret with surprise, for the idea of eccentricity connected with her uncle was new to her.

"Why, Margaret, you cannot pretend to think him like other people," replied Gerard; "his worthy aims, his unworldly generosity, his innocent little artifices for bringing about his good intentions—even his way of showing his desire for our welfare is different to the ordinary way; he is quite an original."

"It is odd, then, if he is different to most people himself, that his great ambition for me is, that I should be *LIKE* other people," observed Margaret.

"Oh, he talked to me about that," observed Gerard, laughing cautiously. "'I've taken her to school,' he said, 'and I flatter myself—I *do* flatter myself, my boy—that she looks now uncommonly like other people.'

"Well, Gerard, I have taken some pains about it myself," said Margaret; "and I hope they have produced a good result. I hope now I am like other people."

Gerard turned his face upon her full of laughter and surprise. "*You* like other people! *you*, Polly! with those great deep eyes of yours—beseeching eyes that sometimes look as if they were praying for life, and then, before you know what you are about, are wild eyes, like the eyes of some eager bird just going to peck you, and pounce upon you to carry you off to its eyrie. And now—" he would have added, but that he did not choose to flatter her, "now they are lovely and mournful eyes."

"And now what?" said Margaret with a sigh.

"O, never mind what, Polly; but tell me why on earth you want to be like other people? Are other people, are the common herd, so interesting, so intellectual? have they such fervid thoughts, and such bright imaginings, that you would gain anything by the change?"

"I should gain something perhaps," said Margaret, going back to her old grief, "because 'every being LOVES its like!'"

"Perhaps so," replied Gerard; "and when Adam was alone in Paradise, no doubt he felt the suffering of isolation before Eve was brought to him; but do you think he wished on that account to descend to a lower nature, and prayed his Maker to change him into a sheep, that he might graze with other sheep, or into a hart, that he might bound and spring with other harts?"

"Of course he did not," Margaret answered almost impatiently; "but then his—the human nature—was undoubtedly the higher nature, and therefore he could not wish it; that would have

been to decline upon a lower range of feelings and a narrower heart than—”

“I am glad you stopped short,” said Gerard, laughing. “We know the conclusion. Margaret, when you were a little child, you could assert yourself well. You always declared that other children knew nothing, and that you would not play with them. Ah, you were a rare little creature at seven years old; such a pickle, such a wild little untamed colt; but then everything you did and said was straightforward and natural, and now I come home and hear some little account from my uncle of your attainments, and yet find you full of missyish airs, and sighing to be like the pretty little lisping misses whose faces have less expression by far than the full moon has, and who—”

“And whom everybody cares for and loves,” interrupted Margaret.

“O, Polly, you will find somebody to love you, all in good time; and remember what I say, he will love you ten thousand times more than he could love an ordinary mortal. He will have been looking for you perhaps a long time, for he will be one of your sort, your tribe, your nation, and when you talk together you will understand each other to admiration, and the uninitiated world will wonder what you mean.” And then, to Margaret’s secret confusion and annoyance, Gerard went on, almost choking with the laughter which he was obliged to suppress, lest he should awake his sleeping uncle, “Shall I tell you what he will be like, Margaret? He will be a tall fellow, perhaps a little shambling in his gait; but we don’t mind that, we who are metaphysical and transcendental; he will have a forehead built up like a blank wall, trees waving on the top of it (the trees being his hair.) After he has seen you once, he will begin to tame the said hair, and try

to calm its wild shagginess. Dictionaries stick out of his pockets, and also his own notes upon different Greek plays. He wears no gloves, and his hat is at the back of his head. When he has seen you twice, he will put it on as other people do. When he has seen you three times, he will go down on one knee, and be eloquent, far more eloquent than common men can be when they are wooing common mortals ; and the usual consequence will follow. I shall give you away, and my uncle shall perform the ceremony. Margaret—?"

"I wish you would not be so ridiculous, Gerard," said Margaret, blushing and turning away her head.

"But, Margaret, I have something to say to you."

"Well, what is it?"

"Merely this, Margaret, that I shall make it my business, as I am proud to say it will be my pleasure, to look out for such an individual. I shall begin to look out for him to-morrow. I hope you have had a pleasant nap, sir?"

"I wish Gerard would not tease me so," thought Margaret as they proceeded down stairs together, the archdeacon having suddenly roused himself.

A few days after came Blanch's letter and offer of the dog ; and Margaret was deep in its contents when Gerard entered the room, and began to pace the floor somewhat impatiently.

"That must be an interesting letter," he thought; "it takes a great deal of reading ! To my certain observation she has turned back the page three times."

"Margaret!" he said aloud.

"Well, Gerard," answered Margaret abstractedly.

"Who sent you that letter?"

"One of the loveliest and most loveable girls

in the world," answered Margaret promptly; and she added, with a lurking smile in her eyes, "She wants to sell me her dog!"

"Sell you her dog!" repeated Gerard, bursting into a laugh. "Well, that is good; mercantile transactions between ladies! and what does this lovely and loveable creature want to do with the pounds, shillings, and pence? buy hard-cake with them? or bracelets? or bows and arrows?"

"I don't know," answered Margaret, once more proceeding to read over the letter.

"O, well," said Gerard, half audibly, "it's of no use my waiting here now; I'll go and look after the mare." He returned in a quarter of an hour, and now Margaret was deep in the *Times*. "What *are* you looking for there?" he exclaimed impatiently; "what can you find in that stupid supplement, Polly?"

"What can I find? O, a great many things of most thrilling interest; such desirable places, such treasures of maids! Now, Gerard, here's a respectable female with two hundred pounds capital, who wishes to meet with a *party* similarly circumstanced to join her in prosecuting a light, genteel, and lucrative business. I think I shall join that female."

"Do," said Gerard.

"Only," proceeded Margaret, "I haven't got two hundred pounds."

"No more has the advertising party, I'll be bound!" exclaimed Gerard.

"I wish I knew what Blanch means by wanting to sell me that creature," said Margaret. "She was always talking of him, and declaring that she would never part with him."

"Women have a right to change their minds. But now, Margaret, I want to consult you about something; can you attend?"

"O yes," replied Margaret, waking up from her reverie.

"Why, Polly," he replied, sinking into a chair, and resuming his usual languor of manner the moment he had succeeded in gaining her attention, "I want to see little Lewis."

"Your half brother?" said Margaret.

"When I say that I *want* to see him, I mean that I consider it decidedly my duty to see him, and I must do it. So when my uncle made me promise not to leave him, but to make his house my home, I told him that I must have the boy from Kensington. It will be a bore to him, and perhaps to me, but it must be done."

"To be sure," said Margaret; "and he will be very happy, I dare say. I don't know why it should be a bore."

"I would rather that my brother was not ten years younger than myself," replied Gerard, "but to have a brother nearly twenty years younger, I do consider quite a—quite a dispensation. Poor little fellow! My six sisters are all very well; but O, that little orphan in petticoats left entirely to me! I felt when I was in India, that if I paid for all he wanted, it was doing my duty by him; but now I must give him something more."

Margaret assented.

"I don't care to have children about me," proceeded Gerard. "I never know what to say to them. Well, he is to come down to-morrow by the train, and what to do with him I don't know."

"I shall see about that," replied Margaret. "Give a boy a saw and some wood for in-door play, and a pony and a fishing-rod for the out-door life, and he will be as happy as a king."

"Ah, thank you, Margaret; but that is not all. This morning, when breakfast was over, my uncle

mysteriously beckoned me into his study, and I followed unsuspectingly. He was rubbing his hands, and smiling as if he had the most delightful news possible to communicate. And, O, Polly, what *do* you think is going to happen to us?"

"I suppose he is going to give some dull dinner parties," she replied; "but no, there would be nothing very dreadful in that!"

"He has invited your Aunt Maitland to come and stay here, and to bring Clara, and Julia, and Harriet; and my aunt has declined, but the girls are coming. You will have to entertain them, Polly; do you hear? He kept this delightful news to himself till the answer came to his invitation, and then poured it into my ears, and I was obliged to seem pleased."

Margaret looked aghast.

"Now, I have a natural liking for old ladies in general," proceeded Gerard, "but if ever in this wicked and miserable world there was an old lady that was an intolerable bore, it is my Aunt Maitland! I remember her as if I had seen her but yesterday."

"But she is not coming," observed Margaret.

"No, but the girls are, or they were (when I left England) as vapid, as silly, as fastidious, and ten times plainer than their mother." He paused for a moment, and then added in an easy, reflective tone, "I can't bear plain women."

"For shame, Gerard!" exclaimed Margaret.
"How rude of you to say so before me!"

Gerard looked at her as if very much amused; but before he had time to say anything, she continued, "Clara and Julia are not so bad, but Harriet is certainly tiresome. She has not the sense of a child, though she is six-and-twenty."

"I know very little about her; but to be shut in-doors for weeks with the dear twins, who were

nearly grown up when I left England, and cannot be much improved, does seem to me rather terrible. I don't like interfering with other people's consciences, but really I wish my uncle could be enlightened on the subject of relationship and its claims. I should like to explain to him as he thinks it his duty to entertain all his relations in his house, that these Maitlands really are no relations at all."

"It would be of no use, Gerard, his conscience is so slippery that if he was told he need not ask them as relations he would do it, because they were old friends, and say *that* was the reason for the invitation."

"I think it hard, notwithstanding, that we should be expected to say 'Aunt' to our great-uncle's widow, after she has married somebody else, and 'Cousin' to that somebody else's children. Dear old man, he little knows how we receive his intended kindness! There certainly has been a look of concealed triumph about him for some days."

"Yes," replied Margaret. "'O my prophetic soul—my uncle!' I have noticed it also, Gerard, and expected something to come of it. Well, we have been very quiet, perhaps dull, hitherto; and now we are to be invaded by one dog, one boy, and three cousins!"

Of these three invasions, the invasion of the boy took place first. He was driven up to the door in a trap, and ushered into the sunny morning-room, where Margaret was sitting alone.

At the first glance Margaret saw how like he was to Gerard—the same light hair, deep grey eyes, so vehement and liquid, and the same easy grace and supple figure.

Margaret drew him towards her, and kissed

him. "How fast his little heart beats!" she thought. "I wonder what he is afraid of?"

Gerard was sitting in his tent at the top of the house. The child looked about him uneasily, and when Margaret offered him some luncheon, he gave a great frightened sigh, and said, "No," and grasped her hand tightly. The unknown brother—the only person that had control over him, ruled his destiny, and had always been held up to him as an object for awe and reverence—this *great unknown* was in the house, and might appear at any moment. "Poor little fellow," she thought; "I had better let him get this meeting over." So she told him to take up his small brown hat and follow her.

The little fellow obeyed, with another deep sigh, and climbed up to the top of the house after her; but just as she was about to open the oaken door, he burst out crying, and begged her to wait a little, and said he must have his hair brushed.

His fright and his childish sensitiveness made Margaret straightway love him; but she knew that it would only make matters worse to let him wait; so smoothing his hair herself with her soft hand, and kissing him as she did so, she snatched his hand, and led him out on to the roof, where Gerard sat. As they advanced between the gables, Gerard laid down his book, and gazed at them as if the brother he had expected was something so different from this little rosy-faced sobbing fellow, that he could not make up his mind as to who he might be; and Margaret had brought him to the tent door before he took any notice of him.

Margaret was vexed, and the more so when Gerard, at last waking from his reverie, burst into a fit of laughing, and seizing the boy, set him on his knee as if to have a nearer view of him.

"Why don't you kiss him?" she said impatiently

in French ; "don't you see what a fright he is in ?" and as she was not obeyed directly, she gave a little impetuous stamp with her foot.

Gerard at last did kiss him ; and the child, still sobbing, hid his face in his breast.

"Here, you little rogue!" exclaimed Gerard ; "don't cry ; do you think I am hungry, and shall want to bite you ? Look up ; look at me."

The child obeyed ; and the two brothers took a long look at each other.

"Now, then," said the elder, "shall I do ? Tell me what you think of me. Don't you think I am a very fine fellow to have such a scrap of a child as you are for my brother ? Eh ?" and so saying, he pinched his cheek and laughed.

With a great sigh of relief, the child looked at Margaret as if he would have said, "Are you sure this is my terrible brother ?"

"Well," continued Gerard, with the child still on his knee, "you know who I am, I suppose ?"

"O yes ; you're Gerard."

"Gerard, to be sure ! and what made you so afraid of me ?"

"Because Pikey said you had eyes like a lion !"

"Pikey ? who's Pikey ? and what does he know about me ?"

"O, Pikey's our head boy but one—he'll be captain next half ; and Pikey has a cousin whose papa is in the 73rd, and he came over from Madras last half, and he said—"

"Good heavens, what a long story !" exclaimed Gerard, very much amused. "Well, what did Pikey's cousin say ?"

"He said he had seen you once when you dined with his papa, and you had eyes like a lion, and he thought you would do something to me."

"Indeed," replied Gerard ; "and when he obliged you with that select opinion of his, did he mention

what the ‘something’ was that I might be expected to do to you?’”

“No,” said the little boy, shaking his head, “but he told Pikey that he thought I had better look out!”

“And I would if I were you,” replied Gerard gravely, “particularly about dinner time, when I am hungry! I’m very dangerous when I’m hungry.”

The boy laughed as if he thought this an exquisite joke. Gerard kissed him again with considerable vehemence, and Margaret was satisfied. The travelled man of the world looked much more like the father than the brother of the little curled-up child, with his loose coat, his leather strap, and his vast horn buttons.

“If you please, sir—if you please, Miss Grant,” exclaimed the nurse, bouncing in with her cheeks red from excitement, and her thick shoes creaking more than usual—“if you please, here’s the big dog come, and he’s tied up, and he’s howling most horrible!”

On hearing this, Margaret rushed down into the yard, and Gerard and his little brother after her. There lay Nero, panting and tired, for he had been as troublesome as a dog possibly could be in his transit from the railway, and the stable boy declared that he had nearly pulled his arm off with tugging at the collar.

Poor Nero! and he was now lying down in high dudgeon, howling, for he had a tolerably clear inkling of what had happened to him, and was wretched accordingly.

“This dog has been beaten!” said Gerard.

“I shouldn’t wonder if he did get a stroke or two at the station, sir, afore I came for him,” observed the stable boy. “He was ramping about and very obstreperous.”

"Humph," said Gerard. "Well, he must have no beatings of that sort here. It's enough to break a dog's spirit. He must be properly chastised, but never ill-used."

Margaret's heart swelled on hearing this. What would Blanch have felt if she could have seen her dog just then, panting, travel-stained, and dusty, howling and tugging at his chain?

"Give him some water," said Gerard, "and take his kennel out of the sun."

Nero was accordingly led off, and Margaret looked after him with tears in her eyes. "Let him alone till he is quieter," said Gerard, and she went in; but the next time she came to see her dog, which was in about an hour, she pitied him less. The two new arrivals, the boy and the dog, had made friends together, and the boy having crept inside the vast kennel, was seated there with his arms round the dog's neck, condoling and caressing.

"If you please, ma'am," cried the nurse, once more coming up to her as she was stooping to peep into the kennel, "there's the three ladies come, and a maid that can't speak English—and—and I've shown them into the best drawing-room."

"Maid and all?" asked Margaret.

"No, Miss; the mamsel's standing in the hall, and it's no use talking to her, she only says 'Platey.'"

"Well, I must go up to them, then," said Margaret, with a deep sigh; and she walked up stairs, feeling very shy and uncomfortable.

There sat the three fashionably-dressed cousins, all in pink, which was the last colour to look well with their hay-coloured hair and dusky complexions.

The meeting was stiff; Margaret did not know

what to say ; the cousins had plenty of talk, but it was not talk that she knew how to respond to.

"How was the dear Archdeacon ? and how was that nice, dear, naughty Gerard ? and how are you, you droll creature, with your dear face that we should have recognized at the world's end ? and, you wicked dear pet, why are you so long answering our letters ?"

Margaret felt terribly shy and awkward, and was exceedingly relieved when, after nearly an hour's talk, during which neither Gerard nor her uncle appeared, they consented to be shown to their rooms, requesting that *Cherie* might be sent for to dress them.

Margaret being thus relieved of them for an hour or so, ran up to her own peculiar den, and took two or three rapid turns in it, stopping every now and then to give the least stamp possible, indicative of her exceeding impatience under the infliction of these three cousins.

A tremendous scuffle is heard on the stairs outside. What *can* that be ? Margaret flings open the door, and behold ! the big dog and the small boy are working their way up together, the dog dragging his chain after him, which chain sometimes trips up the boy, and he rolls over, but recovers his balance, and they make another dash upwards.

"Where are you two going ?" said Margaret very graciously.

"Gerard said I might," was the ambiguous answer, "and I know Nero wishes to come."

"So he shall," replied Margaret, opening the door which led on to the roof; and thereupon enter dog, boy, chain, and herself, the first-mentioned individual snuffing and smelling at the roof, the chimneys, the few leaves that lie about, and finally at the tent where Gerard is sitting, and

where, having been relieved of his chain, he enters and lies down at Gerard's feet.

"Gerard," said Margaret reproachfully, "you might have come down to help me in talking to the cousins. They are so affected that they quite frighten me. I don't know what to say to them."

"You should be as affected as themselves, Polly; that is the best way to meet such people."

"I can't."

"You can't! I'll give you a lesson when I go down. And so they are really come?"

"Yes, with a French maid, and a parrot in a cage, and a little dog, and a squirrel that Julia cannot live without, and a bag of nuts for him, and fourteen boxes, and a guitar-case, and—"

"Hold, hold!" cried Gerard. "Fourteen boxes and a French maid! It's enough to make a fellow faint to think of it. Why, I came from India with only three boxes, and one of them has never been opened! How did you find out, Polly, that they had brought all this furniture and live stock with them?"

"Because the squirrel was loose in the drawing-room, running up the curtains and over my shoulders and head. It must be a French squirrel, I suppose, or Julia thinks English not good enough for him."

"If they cannot speak English before my uncle, he will be seriously annoyed," said Gerard reflectively. "He hates affectation, and the French which he learnt sixty years (or more) since, must be forgotten by this time. I say, Polly, suppose we set up a rival craze, and adorn our conversation with a little Greek?"

"Can't be done," said Margaret; "they are our guests." So saying, she rose and went down into her room to dress. When she entered the drawing-room her uncle was talking to Harriet, and

Gerard was standing before Julia and Clara, who, always inseparable, were seated on a sofa holding each other by the hand in affected attitudes of attention.

"Veux-tu te taire!" exclaimed Julia to Clara, giving her a little pinch. "I will not have my darling pets maligned. Yes, Gerard, I really have a furious penchant for pets. I have such a love of a little pug dog—he really is almost *too* dear and *too* good; but I was obliged to leave him at home because he bit Miss Brown and Mr. Travers, when they were staying with us, so dearest mamma thought he ought not to go out; and he really doesn't want change, for we did take him to the sea this spring."

"What coast did you take him to?" asked Gerard, with an air of idle interest.

"We were at Bridlington," said Clara.

"Hastings is much better for dogs," observed Gerard coolly. "I wouldn't take a dog of mine to Bridlington. You should take him to a mild air, particularly if he has change only once in the season."

"I'm afraid Hastings would not suit dearest mamma so well," said Clara reflectively; "but we might try it."

At this moment the parrot gave a horrible scream, which made the archdeacon jump in his chair. Harriet started up with outstretched arms, and tripping across the room, sunk with all her flounces on the floor beside the parrot's cage. "Qu'avez-vous, ma chère!" she exclaimed in a condoling voice.

"Que ses yeux sont pénétrans!" cried Gerard, affecting rapture just as the creature drew a grey film over the fierce stupidity of her eyes.

Harriet looked up and blushed. She could not make up her mind whether Gerard was speaking French in compliment to her, or whether he was

laughing at her; and before she could decide they were called to dinner.

At dinner Margaret had the greatest difficulty in keeping a tolerable appearance of gravity. Her cousins, whose forte and pride was their affectation, were completely outdone by Gerard; and her uncle's surprise was evident. He looked at Gerard every now and then with an acute and inquisitive twinkle in his black eyes that seemed to say, "This is not quite the man I took him for; I cannot quite make him out;" but not being able to solve the problem of this sudden change, he at last gave it up and applied himself to his dinner.

Gerard said his man was to be fetched, and as the said individual had not been seen in the dining-room before, the archdeacon was surprised.

The man entered, to the secret amusement of Margaret, and the admiration of the cousins. He was dressed in a large green and red shawl worn by way of petticoat, a tight vest of green cashmere, and over that a loose muslin jacket; his head was adorned with a turban of white muslin; and his dun-coloured face, and rolling eyes, as he stood submissively behind his master's chair, with his hands pressed together, like one who prays, had a sufficiently distinguished appearance—at least Harriet said so.

Gerard contrived to keep this man fully occupied in waiting on him, speaking to him in Hindoostancee, and requiring all sorts of trifling services—lolling in his chair, complaining of lassitude, and at last sending his "native" out of the room with a tumbler. "I have sent him to the spring," he observed, "the spring in the fruit garden, to get me some fresh water."

"Won't be able to drink it, Gerard, my boy," said the archdeacon; "that spring is impregnated with iron."

On this both Gerard and Margaret laughed; and Margaret was so frightened lest her cousins should discover this by-play, that she took courage and set vigorously to work to purvey conversation; and so completely were the cousins overshadowed by the super-affectation of Gerard, that they now talked very much like reasonable creatures, and their discourse was not much interlarded with French.

"I have had a deputation this morning, Mr. Archdeacon," said Gerard, when the ladies were gone, and he could resume his natural manner. "The members of the Literary Institution of G—— have done me the honour to request my services to give them a lecture next Thursday, in consequence of the illness of some professional lecturer who was to have come down. I suppose I must accede to the request, as you had so much to do in founding the institution?"

The archdeacon was pleased; but Gerard had astonished him, and he could not quite recover his equanimity. "That is his notion of the way to make himself agreeable to the ladies," thought the guileless old man; "but I think it is a mistake; his usual manner when alone with me is far more pleasing."

"You have no objection, I presume, to this lecture?—you would like it?" said Gerard.

"O ay, ay," answered his uncle, rousing himself; "and what is the subject?"

"Why, the subject their professed lecturer was to take was rather mistily expressed in his letter to the deputation, which they showed me. It was on the nature of high art, with an inquiry as to its uses, and as to the likelihood that art would survive this existence. There are to be two lectures."

"O," said the archdeacon. He had a very indistinct notion as to what high art might be, but

he ventured to say that he thought the subject seemed abstruse.

Gerard reminded him that the neighbourhood would make a descent into G——, as was usual on the lecture evenings; so that there was no doubt he should be listened to with all the intelligence that his lecture was likely to deserve.

"A week is a short time to write it in," observed the archdeacon.

"Very short if one had no help; but I have several lectures that I read in India, and if I have not finished this subject in time, I shall take one of those. I stipulated for that privilege. I think I shall get Margaret to help me; the subject would just suit her."

Accordingly, when he went up stairs, he told Margaret of the deputation; but Margaret was occupied with her cousins. They were fond of singing duets, while the third sister played for them, and Margaret, as in duty bound, was listening.

At last the archdeacon came up with a young clergyman who had called to see him on business, and had been asked to spend the evening. Margaret, finding that the piano was now fully attended without her presence, went and sat in a window at the further end of the room, and looked out into the summer darkness.

"Well, Polly," said Gerard, coming up to her, "our lecture is to come off next Thursday."

"Our lecture!"

"To be sure; here is a useful work that presents itself to you—a way of using your talent. It cannot be written in the time unless you are willing to help, but if you are, it may be. You might jot me down a good many ideas, which I could follow out; you might, by mere discussion with me, assist me in making clear to my own mind what I really do think on the subject."

"Gerard, you are more generous than I should be if I were a man."

"How so?"

"If I were a man, and if I had anything so delightful as this lecture to write, I should not like one of the lesser sex to have any hand in it."

"Indeed! Well, specimen of the lesser sex, (an uncommon specimen, by the by,) what do you think of the title of my lecture? It divides itself into three heads; it is on the nature of art, the uses of art, and the likelihood of its surviving this present existence."

"I do not believe that it *will* share with us our immortality."

"Your reason?"

"Give me a definition of art, and I will tell you my reason."

"Try your own hand at the definition, Polly."

"No, my definitions are so long and rambling."

"Well, I will try to satisfy you, and give you the result of what I have been reading on the subject since the députation left me—though, mind, I am not satisfied. Art, they seem to prove, is the embodiment of what is most spiritual in our nature—the expression of our yearnings after the divine and perfect—consequently the artistic spirit is part of our immortal nature, and will certainly survive the tomb. I do not like that view, and it seems that you do not."

"No; because that very word *embody* seems to doom it to annihilation. Can that which is embodied live, and have significance, for the disembodied? Since we are of twofold nature, the one nature makes use of the other to express itself by; the immaterial shut up within the material, only by it can see, and hear, and speak. By means of this gracious material, it catches glimpses of beauty and sweetness; and with that same material it

fashions for itself a shadow or expression of the beauty or the sweetness. This shadow we call a work of art. It is something born of spirit and matter—the child of their union. What significance, then, will art have for us when these natures are divided? when the material, no longer inspired, shall be blind, and deaf, and dumb again? and when the immaterial needs no symbols, but sees face to face, and knows as it is known?"

"And yet," said Gerard, smiling at her earnestness, "one does not like to think that this finest thing which humanity has wrought out of its breath and clay, should utterly fall away—that all the music of this life, with its unutterable tenderness and its yearning aspirations, should be quite forgotten, and that no echoes of it should linger in immortal ears, though it be sounded on material strings or blown with leather bellows."

Margaret laughed, but presently added seriously, "When I was a very, very little child, before mamma died, she used to sing to me at night, before I went to sleep. There was one song that I was passionately fond of, and I used to think, after she was dead, that if ever I saw her in heaven, I would ask her to sing it to me again."

"In that case," Gerard replied, "reason may be with you, Polly, in your view of art; but feeling is certainly on the other side."

"But, after all," Margaret said, "we are arguing without book, for we know there is to be a spiritual *body*—and we do not know what that may be—so we come to a conclusion in which nothing is concluded; and art may be immortal, after all."

"If you please, sir," cries a panting and somewhat cracked voice behind them.

Gerard and Margaret turn from the window hastily.

"O, if you please, sir," says the stable boy, now dressed up as a page in buttons, "the big dog, sir, has got his head through the collar, and he's off to the water among the birds."

"What's that?" exclaims the archdeacon.

"Nero's swimming and barking among the water-fowl, if you please, sir; and, if you please, gardener says he'll kill them, now they are roosting, by dozens!"

Gerard by this time is downstairs, Margaret, and the cousins, and the archdeacon, and the clergyman, and the stable boy, follow to see the fun.

It is intensely hot; Margaret flying over the dry and dewless grass, is a beacon to the others, for her white dress glances through the darkness. The cousins gather up their flounces, and skim after Margaret in their thin shoes; pressing through the narrow belt of larch trees, rushing across the lawn, between the thickets of white and red roses, all giving out their richest perfume into the night air; and finally dashing down the slope, the white dress being still their pioneer, till they stop, out of breath, and hear the soft sobbing sound of water moving and swelling among a thick bed of reeds at their feet.

"O my dog! O my fine fellow!" says Margaret; "I hope Gerard won't beat him when he comes to land."

A distant noise of joyous exulting barks comes to them across the water, and then a vast quacking, and crying, and flapping of wings; the fowl rise, and fly past the girls in crowds; the dog barks, dashes about, and exults; Gerard shouts "Nero, Ne-ro!" and a little figure of a boy, just awakened from his balmy slumber, runs among them half dressed, and exclaims, "O jolly!"

Someone runs out of the house with a lamp, and they presently set a light to several dead boughs

that lie about, and make a little fire with them and the hay which is close at hand, by way of finding the dog's whereabouts. It is all the work of a few moments. "O how jolly!" cries the little boy; "how very jolly, Gerard! O, please, Gerard, let me get into the punt with you, and chase Nero."

"He will kill the coots by dozens!" says Gerard.

"I would not have had this happen for twenty pounds!" observes the archdeacon.

"Hurra!" cries the little figure, dancing round the bonfire.

"Hush!" says Margaret. "I hear the dog swimming towards us."

"There he is!" cry all the cousins, as the dog's white waistcoat is seen in the red light of the fire.

Nero, panting and proud, comes to land and lays two fine young ducks, quite dead, at Margaret's feet; then he affectionately rubs himself and shakes himself all over her till she is covered with mud, weeds, feathers, and dirty water.

Nero is tied up again. The next morning the water is seen scattered over with dead water-fowl. Thirteen are brought in by breakfast-time; and again the archdeacon says regretfully, "I wouldn't have had this happen for twenty pounds!"



CHAPTER VII.

A QUARREL.

“What so wild as words are ?
—I and thou
In debate, as birds are,
Hawk on bough !”

ROBERT BROWNING.

HE next few days passed rather drearily away. A great deal of French was talked, a great many anecdotes were related concerning the pets ; and Margaret would sometimes steal up stairs once or twice before luncheon to write, for the part that Gerard had assigned to her of his lecture did not require much continuous thought. He wanted a few eloquent descriptions, he said, of some of the finest works of art extant; and Margaret was one day writing them by snatches, when her little cousin came running up to her den, and begged that he might go out, and take Nero with him. Margaret said *No*, but she gave the boy a saw, and promised to go out with him and the dog herself after luncheon. Presently he came and asked her if he might have some of that “mud” that lay in a trough beside the Medusa’s head. He wanted to see if he could not make something of it. Margaret let him have

the mud, and deep in thought continued to read on the subject she was to illustrate. She had just finished a spirited description of Michael Angelo's "Moses," when the child again appealed to her; and she looked up and found him, as might have been expected, covered with clay, bedaubed, and happy, with three dumpling-like lumps before him.

"Look, Cousin Margaret!" he exclaimed; "just look at my three apple puddings! Don't you think they are exactly like real ones?"

"O you dreadful little creature!" cried Margaret; "how could you make yourself in such a mess?"

"Will Gerard mind?" asked the little boy with sudden alarm.

"Gerard! no; he will know nothing about it, but *I* mind."

"O, but it is so jolly," pleaded the little fellow.

"Then you do not care whether *I* mind or not?"
The boy looked at her shrewdly.

"Why don't you answer?" she exclaimed. "Do you care whether *I* mind or not?"

"Not particularly," he answered, with a smile on his round blooming face.

"Why not?" asked Margaret, gently pinching his cheek.

"O, because—because you are only a lady!"

"Only a lady! you audacious little fellow, what do you mean?"

But the lump of clay in his hand, and a bespattered coat, and liberty to splash himself with water, made this young gentleman far too happy to give his mind to an answer, and he continued to turn it about in his small fists, and delight in the marks of his own fingers upon it, till Margaret had once or twice repeated the question; then he said, still not taking his eyes off his work of art,

"Pikey says girls and ladies are no use excepting to ask for holidays."

"Pikey is a goose," said Margaret.

"But you know," observed the boy, "girls and ladies can't do anything; they can't shoot rooks, and they can't climb. Why, Pikey's sister, who is quite as big as he is, can't even climb into an apple tree! And they can't row, and they can't knuckle down at taw. O! you *should* see Pikey's sister try to play marbles; O!"

"What was it that Gerard gave you this morning?" asked Margaret.

"A blackbird that had hurt his wing."

"What have you done with him?"

"Shut him up in a basket till I can have a cage to put him in."

"Suppose I make him a cage," said Margaret.

The boy looked surprised. Margaret took up a bit of wood, and sawed it square with great dexterity: then she found some wire, and pinched it into equal lengths. An air of respect came over the boy's face, and he continued to regard her fixedly while she went on with the work.

"He shall have a proper wicker-work cage soon, and I shall carve four pillars for the four corners. At present this common little wire one will do."

"O, jolly!" said the small boy, jumping round her. "May I help to bore the holes to put those wires in?"

Margaret gave him the tools, and allowed him to try his hand at her work, having previously made him wash them in her clay trough; then she sauntered up to the puddings that he had made, and her eyes fell full on her Medusa. It was an unlucky moment for that work of art. Margaret's mind was excited to enthusiasm by the descriptions she had just been reading of the great masterpieces, and she was so startled to see how

much her own handiwork fell short, not only in conception, but even, as she thought, of her own powers, if she had more fully exerted them, that she straightway took up a little graving tool, and without stopping a moment to consider, she ruthlessly broke the clay into a hundred pieces, and threw back the morsels among the water.

"I shall make a better one," she thought: and at that instant Gerard entered.

"I supposed I should find you here," said Gerard. "Why, Polly, where's the Medusa?"

"I have just this minute broken it up," said Margaret, coolly.

Gerard said nothing, but he actually coloured with vexation, and if the expression of his face might be trusted, he was exceedingly angry.

"Broken it up!" he exclaimed at length. "O, Margaret, you really are incorrigible;" and he was so evidently displeased, that Margaret felt angry in her turn.

"Yes," she repeated, "I have broken it up. I suppose I had no need to consult anyone's pleasure but my own."

"It is tolerably evident that you did not *care* to consult anyone's pleasure but your own," replied Gerard, walking about the room as if so vexed that he actually could not keep still; and Margaret was so nettled at his anger, and at the unceremonious way in which he expressed it, that she answered with asperity, "You are entirely mistaken; you are mistaken both as regards yourself and me."

"You will never bring anything to perfection," replied Gerard, still more vexed. "That terrible instability of purpose follows you at every turn. What was wanting to that Medusa's head but one morning's work to complete its excellence? and yet because a sudden caprice takes you, you must

needs break it to pieces, without consulting any-one. Do you mean to say that I am mistaken there? Am I not right, and do you not know it?"

"Yes," said Margaret. "You are not mistaken there."

"In what am I mistaken then?"

"You are mistaken if you think that there is any such difference in our age, any such superiority in your sex, or any such near relationship between us, as entitles you to be angry at anything I may have done with my own possessions," replied Margaret, her eager and impetuous temper getting the upper hand of her better feelings.

Gerard's eyes flashed and dilated, but his anger, whether reasonable or unreasonable, had subsided; and he said, with the firmness of a man who believes himself to be in the right, "How much difference of age is there, Margaret?"

Margaret made no reply, but swelling at heart with surprise and vexation, turned and walked to the extremity of the long room, where the happy little boy was hard at work with his cage, all unconscious of the quarrel; and his holland coat and light hair printed all over with the shadows of ivy leaves.

There was nothing in the busy and yet peaceful nature of that scene to suit Margaret's feelings. She turned again, and Gerard still steadily repeated, "What difference is there, Margaret?—Margaret?"

"Ten years," replied Margaret, impatiently. "Why do you ask? You know there is only ten years."

"Only!" repeated Gerard; "*only!* Margaret. Is not ten years a difference unspeakable? Is not *the* most important ten years of all our lives, however old we may live to be, a difference enough to justify, or at least to excuse—"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Margaret,

still walking up and down, and her bosom still heaving with excitement; but whether she intended to say that the difference did not excuse his interference, or to express regret for some of the remarks she had made, did not appear.

"You were angry because I animadverted on your conduct," proceeded Gerard.

"I was," said Margaret; and she added in a softer, lower tone, as if half afraid, "I am!"

"I cannot express any regret," said Gerard; "and I shall do it again."

Margaret's astonishment was very great. She turned with parted lips and head thrown back to look at, almost to stare at him, so completely did he amaze and pique her. Gerard was standing with his arms folded, and leaning against the rough white wall. His habitual ease had not deserted him even then; but as she stood stationary, gazing at him, it seemed to occur to him that she had no chair, and he went and fetched her the only one the place afforded, and then came back to his place.

"You will do it again!" repeated Margaret, as still standing, she leaned her hands on the back of the chair. "Then I think I should be glad to know by what right you will do it again?"

Gerard started, and in his turn looked both annoyed and abashed.

"It is natural," he replied, "that I should be distressed at the way in which I see you wasting your fine talents."

"But by what right?" repeated Margaret.

Gerard bit his lips, and tried again. "Well, if I must needs be very explicit," he exclaimed, "by the right which is given me by the affection and regard that I have always felt for you." And now the quarrel began to take a more personal turn. "You knew perfectly," Gerald exclaimed, "you knew

perfectly that I had an extreme liking for that Medusa ; you know that I never passed to the roof, if you were not here, without coming in to look at it. It was a wonderful pleasure to me to look down upon its clay-cold beauty—a pleasure that I have indulged at night long after you were asleep ; and now for a freak you have destroyed it ! and with it go down all the hopes I had indulged respecting you. I did hope it was an evidence that you *could* think and work perseveringly for one object ; that you *could* bring at least one beginning to its end without marring it ! ”

“ I did *not* know that you cared for my Medusa ! ” said Margaret, impetuously ; “ and how could I guess that you looked at it when I was not here ? You are most absurd ; you are most unreasonable, Gerard ! You never *said* you wished it to be preserved ! Did you expect me to know your wishes by intuition ? ”

Perhaps he did expect it, or perhaps he was not prepared for the matter-of-fact way in which she received speeches of his which would have conveyed a great deal to the minds of most girls, and which would have made her own heart leap if Blanch had uttered them. Certain it is that she had no sooner spoken than his whole countenance and manner changed. He seemed, or he would have seemed to Margaret, if she had noticed him, to become older, harder, and colder ; and he drew himself back from the wall with a slight shiver, as if the weather, warm though it was for an English autumn, made him feel chilly.

“ If you really did not know that I cared about the Medusa , ” he said with forced indifference, “ of course I have no reason to complain.”

“ You are the last person I should have thought likely to care for such an inferior thing,” she replied.

"Why the last person?" asked Gerard, turning upon her suddenly. "Am I then the last person whom you should have expected to take an interest in your progress?"

"You give my words a meaning that I did not intend them to convey," said Margaret, weary of the dispute.

Gerard perceived the slight gesture of fatigue that she indulged in, and instantly seemed more anxious than herself to terminate the discussion. "Well, I have done," he said with a sigh; and he looked down regretfully into the trough where lay the remains of the ruined Medusa; then turned to Margaret, and held out his hand.

Margaret had recovered her temper, and she now put her hands behind her, and said, half in play, half in earnest, "However great may be the respect that you may think I owe you in consequence of the vast difference in our ages, I will not shake hands with you, except on certain conditions."

"Well," said Gerard, smiling in spite of himself, "what are they, Polly?"

"I have just thought of a new condition, and I will name it first. You must leave off calling me Polly."

"I will see about it," he replied, subsiding into good humour.

"For I am nearly seventeen," proceeded Margaret, "and I do not like to be treated like a child."

"Do I treat you like a child, Polly?"

"There, you are doing it again. Yes, of course you do, Gerard. I expect to be treated like a young lady—treated as you treat the cousins, for instance!"

"Oh! I flirt with the cousins; it is the only way to amuse them."

"I don't mean *that*," said Margaret, not at all

out of countenance, "but I mean that I do not see why I should not be treated like other young ladies in general."

"I flirt with all young ladies."

Margaret gave one of her little impatient stamps. It was not audible, but it was visible; and Gerard continued: "I don't know how to keep up a conversation without a little mild flirting, unless a girl is really sensible, and spirited, and well informed; and most womenkind are not so. But, Margaret, it would be impossible to flirt with you. I could not do it."

"And you know perfectly that I don't wish it," retorted Margaret, still with her hands behind her. "I know I have no small talk, and am not amusing; and I know I am so plain that gentlemen never will want to flirt with me, as you call it; besides, I don't know how to do it, and if I did, I should not choose."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, indeed."

"So no one will want to flirt with you? I am glad of it."

"And I can't think what they want to flirt with *you* for!"

"Perhaps because I am not *so* plain. Now *you* are plain, you know, Polly—you told me *so yourself!*"

"I should not have told you if I had not been sure you had sense enough to find it out for yourself."

"Well done, Polly; that is less like a child's speech than any you have made this half hour; but I declare to you, Polly, I should never have found out that you were plain if you had not told me. Even now, though you assure me of the fact, I can scarcely believe it."

"Gerard!" exclaimed Margaret, with wide open eyes of wonder.



"Beauty is a matter of opinion," persisted Gerard, looking at her as she stood with her fine head thrown back, and her dilating eyes gazing at him. Her lips were parted with an incredulous smile, half pity, half amusement. "Beauty," he continued, "is spirit more than form, and movement quite as much as colouring."

"It is *not* a matter of opinion!" exclaimed Margaret, forgetting in the ardour of her feelings that this discussion concerned herself. "Look at all the old models! the glorious Greek models! Look at—"

"I won't," said Gerard, laughing. "I shall look at whatever I please; but I quite forgot till this moment, Polly—"

"Polly again!" exclaimed Margaret.

"Well, Miss Margaret Grant, I forgot till this moment that we have been quarrelling horribly, and that we have not made it up yet! Witness your hands still tightly clasped behind you."

"I had forgotten it too," replied Margaret; "but the conditions, Gerard," she added more gravely.

"Well, the conditions; what are they?"

"Why really, Gerard, I don't see what right you have to assume any authority over me; and you must not—you really must not scold me so unmercifully!"

"Authority!" repeated Gerard. "I assume no authority!"

"At any rate, you assume a right to a great deal of influence, and you have none."

"No influence, do you mean, or no right to any?"

"No *either*," said Margaret, laughing.

"Now, there we differ, Polly. *I* think I *have* influence; but time will prove. If I have none, I promise you solemnly that I will never use any."

"O, Gerard! I do wish you would treat the matter gravely."

"We began by treating it gravely, and a sad mistake it proved. Come, Polly, shake hands."

"At least, you shall promise first not to scold me again."

"Not even when you deserve it? I shall promise nothing of the kind. Who is to scold you if I do not? Come, I am tired of standing in this sawdusty hole; besides, I suppose you admit that you have faults? Why then expect me not to know it?"

Margaret gave her hand. "To be sure," she said; "I always knew that I was idle; that I procrastinated; that I wanted strength of will to finish what I had begun; and that I never could excel, for want of perseverance and patience. All I objected to in what you said, was not that it wanted truth, but that I did not see why I was to hear that truth from you."

"You will have to hear of your faults often from me," replied Gerard, taking the hand so tardily offered, and laying it on his browner palm; "and," he continued coolly, "I have no doubt that you will derive benefit from my censorship on the whole. You have a great deal of knowledge, Polly, but it lies in disordered heaps in the chambers of your brain, instead of being properly stored and arranged. Then, you have a rich and splendid imagination, but it is all running riot, the weeds seeding, the plants undisciplined; and you are capricious besides."

"Well, as I have so many faults," said Margaret, withdrawing her hand, and looking at him with a dreamy smile, "it must be a comfort to you to be so sure of improving me by your censorship."

"It *is* a comfort. But, Polly, it is very tiring to stand so long."

"Sit down then; here is THE chair. The great difference of age, you know, makes it *convenable* that I should stand."

"So it does. I *will* sit down."

"It is past luncheon time; but that, I suppose, does not matter. Allow me to give you a foot-stool. Now, Lewis," she added, "come down with me; you are going to dine when we have luncheon."

Accordingly Margaret withdrew; but Gerard did not appear to have enjoyed the honour of using *the* chair so much as might have been expected, for he very shortly made his appearance in the dining-room; and when Margaret remarked that she and all her cousins were presently going out with the dog, he graciously signified his wish to accompany them.

Margaret was glad, for she had been revolving in her mind the propriety of visiting the cottagers, and when to her surprise the Archdeacon also proposed himself as an addition to the party, she thought there could be no want of politeness in her withdrawing herself.

So Margaret and Lewis and the dog set out on their travels; and what Gerard thought of her absenting herself, or whether he troubled himself about it at all, she never thought of inquiring. Nero proved himself quite equal to her utmost hopes of a dog. At first he walked affectionately by her side; he went into every pond she passed, and brought out sticks, rubbing his shaggy coat against her, the object of which action was to prove his good fellowship, but the effect of which was to cover her delicate muslin gown with slimy green water, and dirt of various sorts.

Margaret and Lewis had, notwithstanding, a

very delightful walk with Nero, till just as they reached the lane which led to the Cherry Holts, when a white cat ran out of a cottage, and Nero instantly gave chase. They were within full view of the cottage, and the enraged owner, an old infirm woman, came out and shook her fist and groaned. Margaret, in despair, could only stand still and call the dog till he and the white cat disappeared through the hedge. Margaret, who felt all the awkwardness of her first introduction to the people, made many apologies, and expressed a great deal of sorrow. At last a little rustic in a white hat rushed in upon the scene of action, and said the cat had "clomb" into the top of Widow Pell's apple tree.

"Them nasty dogs leave her no peace of her life," said the wrathful old woman; and Margaret, hoping to please and pacify her, went into the cottage after her, praised the furniture, and admired the fine everlasting peas climbing over her casement. By degrees the old dame was mollified, and began to talk amicably; and as Margaret heard Nero's bark becoming more and more distant, she felt very nervous as to what he might be doing, the more so as Lewis did not come back, for of course he had joined in the chase.

At last a panting was heard outside, and in rushed little Lewis with a very heated face, and eyes that portended mischief. "Oh, they are so angry!" he exclaimed.

"Who are angry?" said Margaret.

"O, the people in the next cottage. They say Nero is a brute, and ought to be hanged;" but before he had time to unfold his story, in came Nero, slinking and fawning, with a large white gander flung over his back. He laid it at Margaret's feet, to her shame and displeasure; and when three or four white-headed children came up to the

door, crying and sobbing and moaning over the dead gander, she felt so much vexed that she was ready to cry too.

She went to the cottage where the injured parties lived, and offered them five shillings, which was received not quite ungraciously, but without any attempt to answer her many expressions of regret. Margaret felt very shy and too much ashamed to be eloquent, or she would have been able perhaps to obtain cordial forgiveness; but as it was she went away mortified, and left the people sullen and unforgiving.

The dog walked home by her side, and behaved well, but she felt that she must never take him out again till she had attained some control over him. Her first visits had certainly been very unfortunate; and when at dinner-time she related her adventures to the party round the table, Gerard said it was very indiscreet of her to venture on taking such a dog as Nero unless she was sure she could manage him; and then he said, with a smile, "And so you mean to visit among the cottages, Polly?"

"O yes," said Margaret, quite forgetting that she had told him he had no influence over her only a few hours since, and had set out to do what he had seemed to think her duty, immediately after.

"Then I think I shall go round among the people in the Cherry Holts," he observed, "and try to make your peace with them, for you will never do any good there if they begin by having a prejudice against you."

He seemed to have proposed this as a matter of expediency, almost of duty, but Margaret felt that it was very kind, and thanked him warmly.

"You know, Gerard," she said, "they will respect what you say, if you declare that I could not

prevent my dog from annoying them, for you are so much older than I am."

"Yes," said Gerard; and he smiled again.

He had a very radiant smile, and Margaret, as she looked at him, observed its peculiar beauty for the first time.

The next morning Margaret went out after breakfast to see her dog. He knew he had done wrong, and seemed penitent and inclined to meet her in a friendly spirit. He was certainly a splendid fellow, black as jet, excepting two of his paws, the tip of his tail, and his white waistcoat. Poor Nero! he had always been a pattern of good behaviour at his own home and with his last dear mistress, but he was beginning life very badly with the new ones.

Margaret idled away a good deal of time in the yard. She could not make up her mind to go in and entertain her cousins, and she felt that it would not be proper to go and shut herself up, and deliberately study; so she took, as she thought, a middle course, and lingered about out of doors, neither pleased herself nor pleasing anyone else.

At last she made up her mind. Julia and Harriet were seated in the morning-room with crochet in their hands. She called them to come out and shoot.

They shot for two hours, chattering to Margaret all the time, till she began to have a headache from the sheer fatigued of listening.

Gerard appeared at luncheon-time, and immediately went away again to write his lecture, taking his little brother with him. It was very hot, and Margaret felt quite impatient at the notion of entertaining her cousins all the afternoon; but she was obliged to do it, and during a long dreary drive that the four girls took together, she was fully informed of the newest fashions, the favourite colours, the new way of dressing the hair, &c., &c.

It was quite a relief when the dressing-bell rang, which it did nearly an hour before dinner. O welcome rest! how much Margaret wanted it!

"Why, what is the matter, Polly?" said Gerard, when he met her slowly coming up stairs to her own long study. "Is dulness catching? You look as stupid as our dear cousins!"

"I don't know what is the matter," replied Margaret. "I suppose the close carriage has given me this pain in my head."

"Well, come with me on the roof, and see if the breezes will blow away the pain. Nero is there, and the little fellow."

Margaret gladly obeyed. "I really cannot cope with the Maitlands much longer," she said, sitting down on the cushion, and leaning her head on her hand. "Do read me what you have written, Gerard; perhaps it will do me good."

"Why, Margaret, I never knew you to be affected before; I shall think you have caught that fault also of these girls!" exclaimed Gerard. "Do you mean to say that it really makes you feel ill to hear them talk, and be in their society?"

Margaret laughed, and then sighed deeply. The little boy and the dog came and sat by her. The pillows were very comfortable, and the air was very fresh. Gerard began to read; Margaret admired, was interested, and then felt suddenly giddy, and found her head falling forward without any power on her part to keep it up. She could not speak, and Gerard's voice sounded dim and distant; she was only conscious of an impression that it had suddenly become dark night, and then she became perfectly insensible.

Gerard was the first to perceive that she had fainted. There was a great stir on the roof; Nero started up, and barked with all his might; little Lewis danced round the reclining figure, half

frightened, half amused, till Gerard desired him to run down directly, and fetch Margaret's nurse. In the meantime, not knowing what else to do with her, and deafened by the barking of the dog, he took hold of the cushion on which she lay, and which was the long squab of a sofa, and dragged it out of the tent into the open air, with her upon it.

There she lay like a monumental figure, her hair fallen back from her beautiful temples, and her hands dropped at her sides. Gerard stood looking at her in a terrible fright; he did not know what to do next; but he had not many seconds to wait, before the nurse came dashing out like a fury, or a bear robbed of her young; and after her came a confused mass of cousins, men servants, and maid-servants, French and English.

Seeing Gerard bending over her with a face of great solicitude, Margaret managed to say, "I am better, Gerard; don't be uneasy, nurse; I can stand." She then raised herself up, and stood between Gerard and the French maid, while the nurse brought her Gerard's chair.

"I am quite well," Margaret declared presently. "I can go down to dinner;" and accordingly down she came, and sat at the table, but looking so unlike her usual self, that it was decided she should not go to the lecture.

The lecture was to "come off" that same night, and Margaret was very much disappointed; so was Gerard; but it could not be helped, and when they had all set out for the town, leaving Margaret comfortably established on a sofa, she felt much better, and presently fell asleep.

When she awoke she thought herself quite well, and was astonished to hear the wheels of the green brougham grating on the gravel. She had slept for four hours. It was quite dark, excepting for the moon that shone in rather brightly. She

heard Julia's voice through the open door, and at the same time the archdeacon and the others came in. The former asked with great solicitude about his niece, and then they all declared that Gerard's lecture had been received with rapturous applause; that they thought it was one of the best they had ever listened to; and that a great many of the neighbouring gentlemen had come up to compliment the uncle on his nephew's success.

Presently they left the room, and Gerard came in, drawing a chair near Margaret's sofa, and sitting in the moonlight, so that she could see his face quite distinctly. He seemed to be taking his honours coolly enough till she congratulated him, and then the radiant smile came back for a moment, and he reclined in his chair with lazy contentment.

"It was very successful, I hear," said Margaret.

"Yes, very. I remarked during its delivery, that as the time had been so short for its preparation, I had availed myself of the assistance of a friend."

"O, Gerard!"

"I was obliged, of course; and no one could suspect who the friend was; and you had written so many pages of it. Well, Margaret, are you better?"

"Yes, I am very well now I have been asleep."

"Ah. Well, I wish you had been able to go with us and hear the applause that followed so many of the sentences that you yourself had written."

"I should have been terribly put out of countenance."

"You must get accustomed to that, for as long as I stay in England, I shall read lectures, and you must help me with them."

"Must I?"

"To be sure. Writing for these lectures, which, you well know, are at least *intended* to be of use, and to do good, will supply you with an object, a worthy object. I am sorry to see sometimes, Polly, what an objectless life you lead."

"When I am grown up I shall have an object, no doubt."

"Grown up!" exclaimed Gerard, impetuously; and then suddenly checked himself, and continued, "Ah, true! you are very young at present."

"At what age do you consider that a woman is grown up?" asked Margaret, with interest.

"O, it differs in different individuals," replied Gerard, with a little embarrassment of manner. "Perhaps some people would think you grown up now, Polly, as you can write lectures and translate Greek plays."

"Yes, but *you* don't think so, you know. Do you think I shall be quite grown up when I am eighteen?"

"Yes, of course you will."

"I did not know that it was 'of course' with you; for I have noticed that you think differently from most people on several subjects."

"What subjects, for instance?"

"O, age is one. I should not have thought, as you do, that ten years divided people so completely in all their thoughts and feelings, that they do not seem to belong to the same generation; and I should not have thought that at your age you would have considered young people of my age too young for you to associate with, and would have preferred girls of the ages of the Maitlands!"

Gerard laughed on hearing this, but it was not a very joyous laugh; and he presently got up and walked out of the room. He went into the long empty dining-room, where he began to pace up and down, now and then laughing again in a short

defiant way, as if he saw that he had cheated and over-reached himself, and was glad of it.

For the fact was, Gerard was of a highly imaginative turn of mind; and as he had been moving about a good deal in the course of his life, and had not been much among ladies, he was tolerably heart-whole, and had never formed a very deep attachment; but he had for some years past fashioned for himself an ideal wife, a kind of model of what he should wish to take to himself for better and worse; and comparing this ideal with actual women had often saved him from being too much enchanted, for if a woman did an awkward thing, he would say to himself, "My lovely ideal never is awkward." Moreover, the ideal had a particularly neat foot and ankle, and from frequently beholding its perfection with his mind's eye, Gerard became fastidious as to feet and ankles in general.

The name of his ideal was Henrietta—not that he had ever loved a living Henrietta—but he had a fancy for the name. And as a certain sculptor was said to have accumulated for his Venus the charms of all the beauties in Greece, so Gerard gathered together for his Henrietta all the good qualities, and all the graces, of his female friends and acquaintances. He had never seen anything at all like her in the body, but he never intended to marry till he should.

In this state of mind, which he had not seriously changed for several years, he returned to England; and one day, when he had spent a week at Thorley, he found himself mentally comparing his Henrietta with Margaret. For the first time since he had made Henrietta, she suffered by the comparison. She appeared somewhat tame, and he decided on the spot that the said Henrietta should forthwith become more spirited, more clever, and more conversible. So done, he was satisfied;

but the next day he found himself again making the comparison, and he took alarm. "What!" he said to himself, "shall I let this unformed girl, because she has wonderful eyes, and a rich sweet voice, overthrow the empire of my Henrietta? Why, she is a child compared with Henrietta; she has faults too—a great many faults; besides, her feet are no smaller than other people's; and I always did say that my wife should be graceful, and composed, and self-possessed. Pooh! I will not think of such a thing!" Accordingly, having come to this prudent decision, he began to treat Margaret as if she had been a child; to quarrel with her, and to domineer over her. "Why, I may consider myself in some sort as an engaged man," he thought to himself, as he paced the dining-room. "I only care for this childish creature, with her lustrous eyes, as I might do for a niece or a ward; my affections have long been fixed on my ideal; they are, as it were, engaged to Henrietta; and though, to be sure, she has no brother to call me to account, if I prove false to her, yet when a fellow has worshipped in secret such a lovely creature, it is not likely that he should be willing to decline 'upon a lower nature and a narrower heart than hers!'"

It is wonderful how weak some men are on the one particular point which just then engaged Gerard's attention. He was not at all aware that he was behaving in a ridiculous manner as he paced that dining-room in the dusk; and when he came out again, firmly resolved to crush his rising partiality for Margaret in the bud, and to be true to his sweet Henrietta, he thought he had made a highly feasible plan, one that did him credit, and was easy of execution. But circumstances favoured him, and made him think he need not have been frightened after all.

When he came out after his cogitations, Margaret was gone. She could not sit up any longer, her uncle said, and had retired. All the cousins were loud in their lamentations ; they were sure Margaret was going to have an illness. Gerard said he thought it was only the heat which had overpowered her, but he was rather sorry that he had not wished her good-night.

During that night there was an awful thunder-storm, which effectually dissipated all the brooding heat which had hung in the air for a week past. The wind that came with it blew down two young trees in the park, and took Gerard's tent in its strong embrace, tore up the fastenings, and doubling the whole thing together as if it had been an umbrella, flung it over the edge of the house on to the top of a bed of roses, rocking out a dozen or so of young rooks to sprawl upon it.

"If it was the heat which made Margaret ill," thought Gerard, "she is cured by this time; the thermometer is gone down since last night twenty degrees."

But the heat had nothing to do with it. Margaret slept little, awoke with a burning pain in her head, and when her nurse came the next morning to open her shutters, she was found to be spotted all over "like a leopard;" in short, as that functionary said, she had "thrown out" the measles.

The measles ! Margaret was not altogether sorry when her nurse told her what was the matter with her, for during the night her own feverish dreams mingled with the noise of the thunder had so alarmed her that she had feared she must be about to have a dangerous illness.

She lay very quietly in bed, and her fever was too high to admit of her thinking much. She became worse; day and night were confused together, and one day merged itself into another; she

was feeble, weary, conscious of a great wish to pretend to be asleep whenever her cousins came in, but always soothed and comforted by the pleasant company of the French maid, who very frequently came to wait upon her, and sit with her, out of pure good will, for her ladies did not require it of her, and Margaret was generally too confused to be able to ask for her, though she sometimes put out her hand to detain the overdressed and frivolous, but truly kind-hearted creature, and sometimes asked her to do little services.

Ten days passed with little variation; on the eleventh Margaret felt suddenly worse, and lay in her bed crying, and half fainting.

"She is much better, wonderfully better!" said the medical man when he saw her; "the fever has all left her."

Margaret supposed he must be right, but she thought if this were recovery, it was much worse than illness, for she felt weak and low, and very much inclined to shiver.

After some days she was dressed, and laid on her sofa. She had some roast chicken, and a cauliflower, and a glass of claret, for her dinner; and she thought of it all the morning before it was brought in, and when she had finished eating it, she considered what a long time it would be till dinner time to-morrow.

She then asked to see little Lewis, and he was brought in.

"What have you been doing," asked Margaret, "since I have been ill?"

"I've had plenty of nails."

"Indeed! You got them out of my room?"

"Yes, I came and knocked at your door one day last week, when the room was dark; and I asked if I might have some; and nurse said, 'There, get away, do, Master Lewis!' and I said, 'But ask if

I may have some nails ;' and she said I might have as many as I liked ; so I went up to your room and got some. Tin tacks they were. O ! I got such a lot !"

" And what did you do with them ?"

" Why, you know that great old beech-tree by the stables that has such a smooth trunk ?"

" Yes."

" I knocked five hundred in there."

" What for ?"

" What for ! for fun. O ! you can't think how droll that tree looks now it has a belt of tin tacks right round it !"

" Don't jump about so ; you make my head ache. What else have you been doing ?"

" O, quantities of things. I've been to all the cottages with Gerard ; and I've helped Gerard to make Nero behave well ; he's a good dog now, and so fond of Gerard. You don't know what Gerard said about you to the poor people in the cottages."

" No ; I should like to know."

" Ah, but I shan't tell you, because Gerard said you were not to be disturbed. I thought when I first saw you that you were rather old, but I heard Gerard say yesterday, when Julia said you were better, ' Dear little girl ! '

This communication, which had no apparent connection with anything that preceded it, was made while the speaker, balanced on one foot, was winding up a peg-top.

" What do you mean by ' rather old ? ' " inquired Margaret ; to which, still winding up his top, the boy made this answer, if it could be called an answer : " Why, Pikey's eldest sister is nearly seventeen."

" Is that rather old ? "

" O yes. Why, she has no lessons, and she has a pink silk dress with flounces. Pikey says she is

very beautiful; but one of our boys has seen her, and he says she has red hair! Is it ten minutes since I came in here?"

"Yes, I should think about ten minutes."

"Then I had better go; for Gerard said I was not to stay more than ten minutes. You don't know what a quantity of bats we have got out of the chimneys since I came here. I have kept the live ones, and we made a cage for them in your long room."

"In my long room?"

"Yes; we go there every day, because Gerard is making another Medusa, like the one you broke up. Sometimes Julia goes up too!"

"Is the Medusa *very* like the one I broke up?"

"It is rather like, but I don't think it is quite so ugly."

After this, the young gentleman withdrew, previously climbing up on the sofa to kiss Margaret; and she being then left alone, felt that his visit had been a relief to her. It had given her something fresh to think about, which the visits of her cousins seldom did.

The next day she crept down to the morning-room, and was received with a perfect hurricane of congratulations by her cousins. Margaret only then perceived how weak she still was. The light of the room oppressed her, the talk made her head ache, and the being obliged to enter into all that was going on, made her tremble with excitement and fatigue.

At last Gerard came in, and greeted her affectionately, but said she did not look so well as he had expected to see her. Margaret, sitting on a couch, tried to seem as well as she could, but her white face and glazed eyes showed how unable she was to bear the voices and the sunshine that surrounded her.

Gerard was truly sorry to see her wan appearance ; but during her absence the long-loved Henrietta had regained her ascendancy, so he did not feel at all impressed when he came and expressed his hopes that she was better ; but he saw she was overpowered, and was resolved to relieve her, so he proposed to the cousins to come out and shoot, to which they gladly assented ; and then as they were shortly joined by two young curates from a neighbouring parish, he thought they were sure to be amused, even though he left them ; and accordingly he ran in to see how Margaret was getting on, left as she was quite alone. It pained him to see her sitting idle, with her listless cheek on her hand, and a most needless self-reproach stung him. He felt that before she was ill he had taken such a great interest in her, and had shown it so obviously, that he feared she must be hurt at his present neglect. He accordingly came and busied himself with the blinds, which he drew down, and with the pillows, which he heaped up, and then he fetched a rug, and spread it over her ; and when he saw that Margaret could not help crying and sobbing from sheer weakness, he was very uncomfortable, and reproached himself still more.

He came and sat down beside her. "Come, Polly," he said, "you must not give way to low spirits."

"But the Maitlands tired me so," said poor Margaret.

"Well, what can I do for you ? anything?"

"O yes ; if you would read, dear Gerard. My eyes are so weak, and I do want to hear something read to change the current of my thoughts."

Gerard heard her words with a start ; but what was more natural than that she should speak to him affectionately and openly when he treated her like a child, and expected her to look up to him ?

He asked what he should read; and Margaret asked for the lessons for the day. Gerard read them for her, and she lay listening with a docile expression of contentment. When he had done, she further alarmed him by saying, "I like the sound of your voice, Gerard; that does me good, as well as the words you have been reading."

"What a foolish fancy, my little Polly!" he answered; and the perfections of Henrietta appeared to him at that moment with unusual vividness.

"No," said Margaret, "it is not a fancy, surely, that some voices are pleasanter than others. I must like a voice which is rich and deep better than one which creaks, or grates, or squeaks."

Enter Julia.

"Why, Gerard, we couldn't think where you were!"

Gerard being pricked in his conscience, answers nothing, but continues to brood over Margaret's words.

"Do come down and shoot, Gerard. And I want you to find my arrows; I've lost some of them in the grass. Oh, don't look so grave, you dreadful creature!"

Still silence. Julia, seeing little chance of his leaving the room, determines to remain in it herself; accordingly she takes off her gloves, and sits down, taking out her netting.

"O, Gerard!" she suddenly exclaims, as if something of deep interest had just occurred to her, "you never told us—though you talked so much about favourite names last night—you never told us what was *your* favourite name."

"No, because you all would have it that the favourite name was always the name of the favourite person."

"But I don't know why that should prevent your telling," says Julia, simpering a little.

“Perhaps I am not inclined to confide to you the name of my favourite person!”

Margaret, turning towards him, listens with interest.

“O, Margaret, he must be made to tell! O, Gerard, you naughty creature, I really must know!”

“I am sure his favourite name is not Julia,” thinks Margaret, “but you look as if you thought it might be.”

“Well then, if I must speak,” says Gerard, with a ridiculous feeling that he is going to disappoint both the girls, “my favourite name is Henrietta.”

“Henrietta!” says Julia, in rather a blank tone.

Gerard feels, or thinks he feels, that Margaret’s eyes are upon him, and at last he feels also that he must look up and meet them, so he does; they confront him—large, deep, lustrous, and wondering, but interested, and almost smiling. Gerard is greatly relieved by their expression; there is neither sorrow nor reproach in it; she seems amused; and when Julia saunters out of the room, saying that she must go down to the others, they will be tired of waiting for her, then Margaret laughs, and says, “Is she pretty, Gerard?”

“Pooh!” says Gerard, feeling, however, highly pleased at the laugh. “Yes of course she is very pretty. What is your favourite name, Margaret?”

“My favourite name? Oh, I have never considered the subject. But, Gerard, I am almost sorry—yes, I do think I am a little sorry that you have a favourite name.”

“Why, Polly?”

“Oh, because—don’t you remember talking to me on the roof about looking out for a dreadful man with his hair hanging down?”

“Yes, to be sure—a man to be delighted with you, Polly.”

"Yes. Well, I thought then, and I have sometimes thought since, that I could do the same kindness for you! I know such a lovely girl, and one whom it would delight me so much to have for a cousin, only there is an insuperable objection, which I very soon found out."

"Indeed; what is it?"

"Oh, she is scarcely older than I am. Besides, now, you know, I need not trouble myself, there being this Henrietta. I hope, Gerard—"

"What do you hope?"

"Oh, I had better not say it."

"But I insist on hearing it."

"Well then, I hope she is not *much* older than you are."

"You silly child! There, let us drop the subject."

"If you are so peremptory, we must, I suppose. Gerard, you often remind me, in a contrary sense, of that character in Copperfield—at least of his supposed speech, 'You're extremely young, sir!' *You are so extremely old, sir!*'"

Gerard laughed heartily at this; and yet such is the unaccountable inconsistency of human nature, that he was not altogether and entirely pleased to think that Margaret had supposed he could not love any woman who was not as old as himself!

"Well, I must go down," he presently said. "I think our conversation has done you good, Margaret."

"Yes, a great deal of good," said Margaret; and perhaps the thought of this Henrietta making her unconsciously still more at ease with him than before, made her add, "But I hope you will read to me again in the evening."

The next morning, before she left her room, Master Lewis came and paid Margaret a visit. The manner of the visit was this: first thumps

on the door, as of a young gentleman's soft hand ; then partial opening of it, and a vision of a boy's head ; then swinging in of a body, the weight of it being entirely supported on the lock ; finally, entrance of boy, body and soul, but hopping on one foot for no apparent reason.

He had a mysterious look in his face, and came up close to Margaret, whispering, "Would you like to see Nero?"

Margaret nodded ; and out he darted, presently returning, leading the beautiful creature by his chain. Nero at first was very good, very amenable, and friendly ; he lay down on the rug, having been divested of his chain, and ate some chicken bones in a confiding spirit ; but all on a sudden the "native" passed down the passage in his wide trousers and spangled jacket. Nero started up ; the door was ajar ; the dog and "native" were instantly in contact, and the "native" without being hurt, was presently sprawling on the carpet, making a tremendous outcry, and the dog was sitting a yard from him on his haunches, daring him to get up again by growling.

Happily Gerard came out of his bed-room at that instant, and called off the dog. The "native" rose, trembling, and jabbering, and rolling his eyes, while Nero walked with a slinking fawning air to Gerard, and lay down at his feet.

Margaret saw that Gerard had now complete mastery over him, and that in fact *he* was Nero's master ; he was not *her* dog.

"I did hope that *this* creature would love me," thought Margaret, as she watched Gerard and Nero caressing one another ; "but it seems that I have not the art of making either human or brute natures attach themselves to me."

"Where are you going, Margaret?" asked Gerard as she passed him.

"I thought I would go up to the room in the roof," said Margaret.

"Do," he replied; "you cannot catch cold there on such a fine day."

They all proceeded there together. Lewis and the dog played by the north window, while Gerard placed the chair for Margaret by the south window.

"What do you think I have been doing, Polly?" he asked.

"Lewis told me you had been modelling another Medusa."

"The little monkey! what made him fancy it was a Medusa? No, Margaret; but going into the cathedral one day, I saw those carved angels that stand with their calm pure faces over against the great organ, and I was seized with a longing to model one. There it is."

Margaret turned, and close beside her on the bench lay, with folded arms, an angel wrought in clay.

Her first exclamation was, "O, Gerard, how beautiful!"

The prostrate figure lay with its hands crossed over a psaltery which it held upon its breast; the two wings swept down at its sides, and the lovely and somewhat awful sweetness of its face was softened by a cloud of wavy hair.

"O, Gerard, how fair, how beautiful!" repeated Margaret; "how tranquilly those lovely lips pout against one another, and how beautifully quiet those drooping eyelids are! But, Gerard, this is not an angel; it is a woman—a glorified woman perhaps—but still human!"

Gerard, when he made it, had been thinking of his ideal.

"What would you have, Polly?" he replied. "I could not make anything wholly heavenly out of a lump of clay. Yes, she is human; the angel

of my thoughts is human ; the only angel that my earthly heart can comprehend or imitate must still be an *angel wrought in clay !*"

Margaret stood up and drew nearer, looking down with tears in her eyes at the inexpressible tenderness of the face.

"I will show you the drawing I made it from," said Gerard, and he withdrew from the chamber, his faithful dog running after him, as well as his little brother.

Margaret, left alone, struggled with feelings that nearly overpowered her ; there was something so touching in the feminine sweetness of this angel face ; it seemed so to yearn and beseech affection, responding by this expression to the inmost thoughts of her own heart, that she could not withdraw her eyes from it.

"If I could turn you into a living woman," said Margaret, addressing the tranquil angel, "I would give you all the love you are craving for ; but why do I say this ? you would not care for my affection ; you would not give me your own—not," she continued, "that the thought of this would deter me ; you would still be something exquisite, and something noble, for me to love ; and it is quite as necessary that there should be objects to excite affection, as to bestow it."

She remained gazing at it ; the sun came out and threw flickering reflections of ivy leaves over the hair, the temples, and the drapery of Gerard's idol. Margaret observed the sunny sweetness of countenance that this lighting up gave to the model. Its face assumed a less pensive look, but strange to say, at the moment when its yearning expression had roused in Margaret's heart the most distinct and broad repetitions of her own old longing for human love and fellowship, the wings of the angel (whether touched by the warm sun-

light, or shaken by her movement as she leaned forward)—the wings of this angel wrought in clay, suddenly, but almost noiselessly, fell back, and lay on the board beside it. She was only human now; she had put off the heavenly, disrobed herself of her higher nature, and like a living idol, too deeply loved and too nearly gazed on, she had proved herself no angel after all; only an earthly thing which seemed to reprove the heart which had leaned upon it too surely, for trusting in it, for suffering it to obscure the heavenly, and for looking for either continuance or full satisfaction from that which is wrought in clay.

Gerard came back alone.

"O, Gerard, look!" said Margaret, and she raised her pale face to him wetted with tears.

He seemed far more startled and troubled than she had thought he would be, and his face had an almost awe-struck expression as he came up and gazed at his now wingless angel, and said gravely; "Is it possible?"

"You have taken great pains with this angel," said Margaret. "I am so sorry she is broken."

"Thank you, Margaret. Yes, the image is broken; and I *have* taken great pains with it. It is a face which I have thought upon for years." In fact, it was the face of his ideal Henrietta, as nearly as he could produce it with his utmost skill and care.

"Well," he shortly after said with a sigh, "it is of no use lamenting—

'Hin ist hin
Verloren ist verloren.'"

"Gerard," said Margaret, surprised, "you are not superstitious, are you?" for she perceived that, like herself, he had coupled some imagination with his angel.

Gerard said nothing.

"It will be easy," she added, "to replace these fallen wings."

"O no, Margaret," he replied, "let them lie. I gave these angel wings to my mortal ideal; but now that they have fallen from her, I would not deliberately replace them; that would be needlessly foolish and blind."

Margaret sat down again in her chair; and Gerard, who was never happier than when he had a piece of clay in his hand, began to mould a trifling ornament.

"Margaret, you look very mournful," he said.

Margaret replied that she had been thinking a good deal, and that the more she thought, the more unhappy she became.

"What have these thoughts been about?" inquired Gerard.

"O, Gerard!" Margaret answered, "I have been thinking that I am of no use to anybody."

"You were of use to me when you helped me to write that lecture."

"Was I? Well, that is something; but I do not know of any other instance where I have been of use, and I wish to be habitually useful. I want to be necessary to somebody in the world, if only to a little child."

Gerard replied abruptly, and so wide of the mark, as it seemed to Margaret, that in spite of her low spirits she burst into a laugh: "Tom Biliter has absconded!"

"What then?" exclaimed Margaret.

"I thought you wanted a child to be of use to."

"So I do, Gerard."

"Well, he has left his little girl chargeable to the parish."

"Gerard, you are so matter-of-fact sometimes,

you make me laugh. That was not what I had in my mind when I spoke of wishing to be useful."

"O," was Gerard's sole reply.

"But I will do something for her. How old is she?"

"Five years old, and as chubby as Lewis, and as fair as a cherub."

"I'll have her; I'll adopt her!"

"You will not, Margaret."

"Why not?"

"Because you are not old enough, nor sufficiently mistress of yourself yet, to know whether you shall keep in the same mind for long together. You are too changeable to undertake such a charge."

"Then why did you tell me of her?"

"Because I thought you might do something for her, as I mean to do."

"Do what, for instance?"

"Allow the old woman whose cat Nero chased, a fixed sum for taking care of her, or help to pay for her schooling, and help to buy her clothes. Four shillings and sixpence a week is what is fair to pay for her board. I have already agreed to find two shillings and sixpence of it, and you might pay the rest."

"Very well, Gerard, I will."

Thereupon they went down to luncheon; and Margaret soon told her cousins that she was going to assist this poor little child, setting at the same time to work on various little articles of dress with an energy which made her forget that she was still weak, though it did not make her forget how much she had longed to be useful, and how much she still did long; for it is curious that finding something to do which *is* of use, rather increases the desire to do more than satisfies it, though it changes the craving into a less uncomfortable feeling.

The cousins seeing Margaret so employed, wished to help her, and Margaret was more at ease than usual with them, both that afternoon and the following days. The fact is, she had become accustomed to their affected manner, and took it as a matter of course; for it is only with fresh people that affectation answers its end, namely, that of attracting attention. An affected person ought to be able to have a fresh sort of affectation every three days, if she expects always to be surprising, and always exciting attention.

The Archdeacon had written to Mrs. Seagrave to tell her of Margaret's illness, and to ask her to give them her company some other time; so Margaret had no pleasant visitor to look forward to, though as the holidays were rapidly drawing to a close, she the less regretted it.

Gerard noticed a change in her. She seemed now far more tolerant of her cousins, and more willing to devote herself to their amusement, though as she was still very weak, it sometimes vexed him to find that the more Margaret gave of her time and powers, the more they expected, and at last became so much amused with the conversations which she now appeared to think it her duty to hold with them, that they rarely allowed her to have any time for her own studies or amusements.

But all visits must come to an end, if one only gives them time enough; and accordingly so did the visit of these cousins, for at last they and their French maid, (on whom Margaret had bestowed one of her grandest shawls and bonnet, which had been bought in imitation of Mrs. Salter's habiliments,) and their "live stock," drove from the door; and she had scarcely had time to consider whether she was not rather sorry on the whole to lose all female companionship, when Gerard, whose

spirits rose visibly as the carriage drove away, proposed a walk to her, and took her off to visit some of the poor people.

The Archdeacon was surprised that nothing in the matrimonial line had come of this visit. He did not like to hear his great-nieces speak French when English would have done better, but he had no rooted objection to them or their manners; and as he walked back to his study, he sagely thought to himself that Margaret must not be thrown too much into Gerard's fascinating society, or, said he to himself, nodding and looking wise, "the consequences are inevitable." Having pleased himself with this sagacious reflection, he ran over in his mind the young men of the neighbourhood, and decided that when Christmas came he would have some of them to stay in the house to avert these inevitable consequences; "because," said he to himself, "it will not appear, of course, that I have them to divert Margaret from thinking of her cousin, but to be companions to him." Here he nodded again, and was so happy in the notion of his own shrewdness, that it is a good thing he did not know the true state of the case, or it would have disconcerted him not a little.

In the meantime Gerard and Margaret took their way across one corner of a large desolate tract of heath, called the Chase, to the village school, that they might see their protégé, and afterwards to the cottages beyond, where Gerard introduced Margaret to the people who inhabited them, and by his easy way of talking to them, which was at once sympathizing and cheerful, gave her her first lesson in the art of being acceptable to the poor.

He was deep in thought when she happened to ask him some trifling question, for they were on their way back through the fern and heather, and

had been long silent; but on hearing the sound of her voice he started. What did it recall him from? Gerard was angry with himself when he remembered that he had been thinking not of his Henrietta, but of Margaret herself—thinking with some interest of how she had conducted herself in the cottages, not in the least forgetting that though come to offer help, she was still a visitor, and that a certain kind of courtesy was due from her to them whom she had called upon—thinking also how graceful that natural shyness and shrinking from putting herself forward had suddenly become in this novel position. But he woke up from these thoughts at the sound of her voice, and looking her in the face to prove to himself how unworthy she was to compare with his Henrietta, he said composedly, “What did you say, my dear?”

Margaret was not surprised, though she did remember that he had never called her “my dear” before, but she only thought it another proof of the great distance of age that he mentally put between them, as indeed he meant her to do, for he said it partly to assure himself that she was only a favourite little cousin of his, while Henrietta was still all in all.

She repeated her question; and in answering it he again looked at her, and that look interfered more with the ideal Henrietta than any that he had ever bestowed on her before.

The yellow afternoon sun shone about her, and rendered transparent and lovely the very dock leaves at her feet; perhaps there was some enchantment in its effect on her; certain it is that Gerard at that moment saw beauty in her that he had never seen hitherto. She was dressed in a white muslin gown, with a little flower here and there upon it, and a tiny green leaf—Gerard observed that it was the leaf and flower of the straw-

berry—and she had a dark crimson Indian shawl, which she had taken off, and was carrying on her arm. Gerard thought this dress probably suited her, for he had never seen her look to so much advantage before; moreover, he liked the grey straw hat with its drooping feathers, and he supposed it must be becoming.

Margaret presently said she was tired, and wished to rest awhile, so they walked up a little knoll all purple and glowing with the flowering ling or heather; and there they sat—she gazing out over the nearly level expanse of the Chase; at the green sheep-paths that cut it here and there; at a flock of sea-gulls that just then flew screaming overhead; and at the great rock which reared its flat head about a mile beyond them, and under which, even at that distance, she could mark a gipsy tent or two, and see the light smoke sifting gradually up through the branches of the one tree that grew there:—and he looking at her.

"And so you go to Mrs. Seagrave this day week?" said Gerard when he had been looking at her some time, and when he had finally resolved that he would alter Henrietta's eyes, and for the future consider them to be exactly like Margaret's.

"This day week," repeated Margaret. "I shall be very glad to see Mrs. Seagrave again, and Blanch."

"O, Blanch—yes, she is your friend, isn't she?"

"No, not exactly. I like her, but I don't think she would care to have me for a friend."

"Indeed; and why not?"

"Oh, she is something like you in some respects. My mind is not so well disciplined as hers, and my feelings are too vehement, and my manners too *gauche*, to suit her. She wishes to improve me, and she is sorry that I have so many defects, but she does not want to be my friend."

"In those respects you think she is like me?"

"Yes," said Margaret, looking at him with an arch smile; "but she does not think me a child, and she does not say 'my dear' to me. I wish she would!"

"O! Polly, I am going out to-morrow—going out for a week."

"Are you? I am sorry."

"Yes, I must, Polly. I am going to give a lecture at H——. It is a lecture to some boys, at the great public school there—a lecture on the cultivation of a manly spirit."

"Why must you go to-morrow? It will not take long to get to H——."

"Why must I go, my dear? Why, because it suits me."

"*At any rate,*" thought Margaret, "I like 'my dear' better than 'Polly.'"

"*At any rate,*" thought Gerard, "I shall soon forget her when she is gone to school, and I shall not see her again till Christmas."

"Did you choose the subject of the lecture yourself, or was it suggested to you?"

"Something of both. I met Dr. A., the head master, at dinner; he was pleased to compliment me, much to my amusement, on my two lectures here; and he asked me half in joke to make a speech to his boys on their meeting again. Then we talked about boys, their curious code of honour, their gentlemanly feeling in some respects. I said I thought the word *manly* or *manlike* included more than our conventional use of it seemed to show; that it meant what was becoming to all the members of the human race, young as well as old, female as well as male; but of course I contended that the conduct which was manly in a boy, was not manly in an adult."

"O, Gerard! what odd ideas you have!"

"Well, we argued the point. Dr. A. said, 'Come and give my boys your ideas on true manliness ;' and I said, 'yes, I would.' "

"And what are your ideas ?"

"Well, Polly, I cannot give them in two seconds. However, to begin, I say that manliness is founded on reason, reason being the characteristic of man ; consequently those boys who are most reasonable are most manly."

"Then the lecture turns on what *is* a reasonable line of conduct in boys, and that you say *is* manly."

"Exactly so ; and if a boy can once be made to see that it is manly to obey, manly to help his masters to govern himself and others, manly to confess his faults, &c., why then you have attained a great hold upon him."

He rose as he spoke, and they walked home together. Margaret was sorry to think that they were to part so soon, and said so. Gerard said he had no doubt she would be greatly improved by her three months' sojourn at school. Early next morning he came and shook hands with her to take leave ; and she shortly after saw him ride away, his black servant following in a trap with some luggage.

And now followed a week such as those old weeks had been. She studied hard ; she thought much ; and she experienced a great deal of that restless dissatisfaction, and craving for she knew not what, which is often felt by persons of an ardent temper, particularly in early youth.

Margaret wished to do right ; she had an unfeigned desire to lead a Christian's life, and this desire had been greatly strengthened during her illness. But her ideas of religion were more considerations of duties that were to be paid, than of love and reverence to be rendered. Gratitude had less place in her mind than awe, yet she was

gradually giving religion more place in her thoughts, and in this, "the day of small things," she was generally conscientiously desirous to do right.

It wanted only one day to the time for her return, and she went to the school at the edge of the Chase to see her little protégé. The afternoon was sunny, and Margaret thought how pretty the brown thatched roof of the building looked, beautified with sunbeams, and enriched with flowering beeks ; but she heard sobbing inside, and the mistress informed her that her little child was naughty; and indeed even then she stood sobbing and pouting out her pretty sulky lips, her face suffused with carnation, and her pinafore crumpled up in her chubby hands.

Margaret led the child outside, and kept her near her, while she sat down on a bench under a chestnut tree. At first, when she talked to her, the little creature stood before her pouting still, and would not answer ; but presently, half forgetting her naughtiness, she held up her rosy mouth to be kissed.

" Why would you not say your hymn to Mrs. Smith ?" said Margaret. " Now you must say it to me. I shall not be pleased with you till you do."

Another sob.

" Now begin," said Margaret gravely ; and the child, in a sorrowful, submissive tone, repeated one verse, and then stopped short. .

" JESUS CHRIST, my LORD and SAVIOUR,
Once became a child like me ;
O that in my whole behaviour,
He my pattern still might be.' "

" Well ?" said Margaret gently to the child, seeing that she stopped short.

Afraid of displeasing, the little creature stam-

mered, and then began again, only repeating the same lines, and then ending. A burst of tears followed this performance, and then the child sobbed out, "I did tell Missis I didn't remember the rest!"

Margaret forgave her, and led her back to the mistress, with a recommendation to her kindness.

She then walked home across the edge of the Chase, and took leave mentally of all her favourite points of view and pretty knolls, for she knew they would be in their winter dress when she saw them again. She hoped she should be improved by that time, for day by day she became more sensible of those faults which stood between her and excellence; and as she walked she repeated half unconsciously to herself the little child's verse, over and over again—

"‘O that in my whole behaviour,
He my pattern still might be!’”





CHAPTER VIII.

MARGARET AND BLANCH.

“There are some moments in each life,
With strange and wayward feelings rife,
When certain words and certain things
Strike on the heart unwonted strings,
And waken forth some solemn tone,
Their nature yet has never known.”

Milnes' Poems of Many Years.

AND now Margaret was standing alone on the steps of Mrs. Seagrave's house, and the past weeks of the holidays were rising before her like a dream. She had seen Blanch, and had felt an almost irresistible inclination to kiss her—*almost*, but not quite; for Blanch held out her hand with a frank smile, and Margaret took it and tried to be contented.

Mrs. Seagrave had made up in some measure, by the warmth of her reception, for Blanch's quiet unimpressed manner; and had already held a long conversation with Margaret, and filled her with new hopes, wishes, and ambitions. She told her that Blanch, having arrived previously to herself, had asked if she might talk with her, and that she had allowed it; that Blanch had told her various

things about the circumstances of her family, and especially of her great desire to improve herself, that she might help her brother. "She asked me," said Mrs. Seagrave, "whether there was not anything she could do beside her lessons to improve herself; whether she could not be put more in the way to educate her own powers of mind;" and I said to her, "It is not possible for me to give you more than the routine instruction that you have hitherto enjoyed, but I advise you to consult Margaret."

"Now, Margaret," Mrs. Seagrave continued, "you must know something of self-education; and as both you and Blanch are chiefly left here now for the sake of music lessons, and language lessons, you both have a good deal of time on your hands; and I have been asked by your respective friends to consider you less as pupils than as parlour boarders, therefore if you are really willing conscientiously to devote yourself to helping Blanch, you may do so; it will be a great improvement to you, and it will make her more likely to attach herself to you, for I suppose you still wish to have her for a friend."

Margaret opened her great eyes, and answered, "Oh, yes;" but that she did not think Blanch would like her as a teacher; she was so very independent.

"She is very reasonable," was the reply; "far more so than her proposed teacher, Margaret, my dear; therefore, as she has a proper respect for my judgment, and I have given it in favour of her consulting you, I feel sure she will do so."

Margaret went up stairs; there was a tiny dressing-room attached to the room where she and Blanch slept, and which they were now permitted to use as a study, as their lessons were generally different to those learned by the other pupils, and

as it was supposed both would make a good use of their privilege.

Blanch was hard at work when Margaret came in. She did not lift up her face, so Margaret took a book and sat down where she could have a good view of her; how pretty she looked; how calm and self-possessed; not one shining lock of hair out of its place; not a crumple on her fresh muslin dress, or her neat ribbons; all, from the little hair bracelet to the delicate shoe, in perfect order—graceful, ladylike, and showing good taste and self-respect. “I wonder,” thought Margaret, “whether she ever means to ask me after her dog; if she does not like to mention him, why did she part with him?—perhaps for the sake of this brother of hers.”

But Margaret thought on, and Blanch did not look up; and at last the bell for tea sounded, and they both were obliged to go down without having exchanged one confidential word together. Margaret fretted against this; but she was too shy to seek confidence, when it seemed to be avoided; and the fact that Blanch, both this day and for several days following, entirely avoided any mention of Nero, made Margaret think it had cost her a great struggle to part with him, and therefore she perhaps not unreasonably wished that he had been sold to any person rather than to herself.

At last, one evening as Margaret sat enjoying the sunshine through the little casement window in the dressing-room, Blanch came in, and as she did not speak, Margaret resolved that she would; so she said suddenly, and almost bluntly, “Blanch, I am sorry you parted with Nero to *me*.”

“Why?” said Blanch, stopping short in her task of watering some plants.

“Because,” continued Margaret, “I think my

having him makes you less inclined than ever to like me."

"I have never done otherwise than like you," replied Blanch; "and I think you are not quite just;" and thereupon the colour flushed over her delicate cheek and neck till they were suffused with crimson.

The moment Margaret saw that she was agitated, her courage forsook her, and instead of having a long conversation with her, as she had fully intended, she sat awkwardly silent; while Blanch, equally uncomfortable, put her drawing to rights, till, to the relief of both of them, Primrose White knocked at the door, and asked to borrow a chalk pencil; when Blanch had given it to her, she stopped a moment and laughed: "So this is the way you study up here!" she remarked. "I think we are quite as industrious down in the school-room. I am sure something has happened, Blanch; for you are red as a rose, and Margaret mute as—"

"Mute as what?" asked Margaret, finding her voice again at last.

"I forget the proverb, my dear. Oh, I have it! mute as a fish! Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Blanch. And when Primrose had shut the door, she began, "Margaret, I believe I was wrong, and I am sorry. It was very wrong in me to have felt sorry that Nero (since I was obliged to part with him) has met with a kind mistress in you; and I scarcely knew that I had such a feeling till you taxed me with it. I hope you will excuse it."

Margaret murmured out that she hoped Blanch would think no more of it; but an inveterate fit of shyness prevented her from doing or saying more; and it was not till the two girls had been together a week, that the subject of Mrs. Seagrave's con-

versation with Blanch was alluded to; on this subject, however, Margaret's lips being once unlocked, she found plenty to say, and sometimes puzzled Blanch by the quantity of information and advice she offered.

"Margaret," said Blanch one day, "I have taken great pains with this, and I cannot succeed."

"What is it?" Margaret very naturally asked.

"You know I want improving very much in composition, so I am trying to compose an essay on this question:—'Which is most essential to the attainment of eminence, genius or perseverance?'"

"That is a bad question," said Margaret; "what put it into your head?"

"Oh, I thought of it myself; but why is it bad?"

"Let me alter the question a little, and put it thus:—Which is most likely to reach the top of a mountain, a man who has a right leg and no left leg, or a man who has a left leg and no right leg?"

"O, Margaret, how absurd! neither is likely."

"Now, please to define eminence."

"Eminence, I suppose, is the best and highest position in anything that can be attained by man."

"Exactly so; when a man has climbed to eminence, or to *an* eminence, he looks down upon the dwellers in the plain; but if many others climb to a still higher peak, he is nothing—at least, he is no longer the eminent man. Now if we call perseverance his left leg, and genius his right leg, what is the use of asking which leg is most essential? for both are essential; inasmuch as if he tries to walk up the mountain with only one leg, he will assuredly be out-walked by some man who has two; he may reach a fair height with his one leg, but the man who has two will at last attain a fairer."

"But suppose that the genius of one man is

very great," said Blanch, "so great as to be a greater advantage to him than the genius and perseverance of a second man, when they are both added together."

"Why, then neither the first nor the second will be eminent; because great genius and great perseverance combined together, will assuredly bring a third above them; at least, if you hold to your definition that eminence is *the* best and *the* highest."

"Well, Margaret, I give up my question. Perhaps its being a bad one was the reason I could not write upon it."

"You did not clearly see what it would lead to."

"Oh, but that is not the only reason I wrote on it mistily; I often understand things perfectly, and yet I cannot write them down nor explain them."

"Never, Blanch! Excuse my saying that you are mistaken in this. Whatever you truly understand, you can clearly convey; writing things down and explaining them, is a good test for finding out whether you understand them or not; and if you do not understand them, writing proves it for you; but writing down your thoughts *cannot* make what was clear become misty, it has a contrary effect."

"But surely there are many sensations and many impressions which are not easy to convey in *words*, and yet we feel them vividly."

"Yes; why are they not easy to convey?"

"I hardly know."

"Remember, Blanch, I did not contend that whatever we can *feel* we can describe, but only that whatever we can fully understand we can convey in words. Now we cannot always understand our impressions. An impression is something from *without*, and we are acted upon by it; but an

idea or a thought is something that flashes from within, an action of the mind."

"I wish I knew something more of my own mind," said Blanch, "and could see what I want, as well as other people see."

"Well, there are few things better than discussions about yourself, to put you in possession of the knowledge you wish for."

"What sort of a mind, then, do *you* think I have got? I wish you would tell me, Margaret."

"A mind very superior to the average."

"Indeed; but not in all respects."

"No. I think you are particularly sensible; your judgment is very clear; your memory excellent; your perseverance likely to do great things for you."

"Then, Margaret, you think mine a matter-of-fact character."

"I should not call it a poetical character, certainly."

"And yet I am particularly fond of poetry, and often write verses."

"Do you write verses because you cannot help it?"

"Oh, no; I find, or am struck by, a measure that I like; and I—then I arrange my thoughts into it."

"Then, if I were you, I would resolutely give up writing verses."

"I will see about it. What would you do to improve yourself, if you could suddenly find yourself turned into Blanch Mostyn?"

"To improve myself in composition?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Blanch, I should so much like to help you."

"What! help me at the beginning, when I suppose you must have arrived at the end?"

"I can write, certainly; but you do not know what a chaos there is in my brain—the lens of your mind may be smaller, but then everything you see through it is clear, and in a good focus; but the lens of mine is only partly clear—there lie dim depths beyond and around that I can see, but not clearly—I can see, but not look at; they are vague nebulous thoughts not yet formed, and I am most conscious of them when, as it were, I am looking away from them."

And so ended this long conversation, leaving Blanch and Margaret far better friends than it found them, and leaving Blanch perfectly willing to take advice from her singular young companion, though still not attracted towards her at all in the same degree that she herself attracted; Margaret's vehemence frightened her, her want of method annoyed her, and her over-sensitiveness made Blanch seldom feel at ease with her.

Margaret had had another conversation with Mrs. Seagrave about Blanch. There was no one perhaps to whom Margaret so completely looked up as she did to Mrs. Seagrave; for much as she respected and loved the dear old Archdeacon, it certainly was not *intellectual* reverence which she felt for him. But Mrs. Seagrave's mental powers commanded her admiration, as fully as her tenderness and depth of feeling had won her love; and Margaret not only obeyed, but did not even *mentally dispute* the truth of any statement she advanced.

"I have been thinking a great deal about Blanch's character," Margaret remarked to Mrs. Seagrave, "ever since you suggested to me the idea that I *could* be of any use to her; and it seems to me what she wants is to study character herself. She has learnt a great deal more than

most girls, and in a far more methodical way, (partly, no doubt, from having been taught by a *man*, and that as learned a one as she describes Mr. Mowbray;) but she does not understand me when I try and *analyse* feelings or define thought."

"The very reverse, then, in all points, of a sentimental young lady," remarked Mrs. Seagrave thoughtfully; "and requiring therefore, of course, precisely opposite treatment to what I have to administer to *that*—the most frequent type of the genus that comes under my notice."

"I hope you do not think *me* a 'sentimental young lady!'" exclaimed Margaret in a tone of horror, forgetting that it was hardly respectful to Mrs. Seagrave to diverge so abruptly from the subject on which she had been asking her advice.

"No, my dear Margaret!" Mrs. Seagrave replied, with her gentlest tone and smile; "you are too earnest for that—perhaps I might say too abrupt also; as you know *I* do not consider abruptness a virtue, although it may possibly be the opposite of a fault. And as I do not consider *you* sentimental, perhaps what I am going to recommend for Blanch, may at least not *hurt* you, (although your minds are so differently constituted)—and that is to read some *stories* together in your hours of recreation. Discussing the characters in them, will enable you to instil into Blanch's mind those delicate shades of difference, which are so intangible, you can hardly explain them in words, except by working them out in examining into a character; and there is no other way to do this that I know of, except analysing and discussing *real* characters, which is hardly safe or right, especially at your age. The great charm of many modern books, is the minute touches with which character is described; and I do not scruple to say some of these books have been of great assist-

ance to me in my vocation—which *is* to read characters, you know, and act upon the knowledge so acquired."

So after this discussion, Margaret procured from London some story books which Mrs. Seagrave recommended, and read them aloud to Blanch in the hours before tea-time, when the other girls were in the schoolroom, learning their tasks by heart for the next day. Margaret liked reading aloud, as *then* she could stop and talk over the characters whenever she liked; and Blanch was glad to devote her fingers meantime to Arthur's shirts.

One day, when the two girls were established in the little dressing room, Blanch, whose attention had been wandering a little, owing to her having attained to a particularly difficult passage in her task of needlework, was recalled to the reading by a slight falter in Margaret's voice.

The story was autobiographically related, and therefore (being very well done) had an intense reality. It described the feelings of a very warm-hearted and impulsive child, undisciplined by a careful early education, and thrown by circumstances in a family that neither understood nor appreciated her. This exasperated a temper naturally hot and easily provoked, till she became really unamiable and unattractive in manner. She felt that her warm affections were all wasted; that no one loved her as she would be loved; and that day by day she was growing less prepossessing, while bitterly mourning all the time over the consequences of her manner. At last a girl came to stay in the house, who was in every respect Ada's beau ideal of a friend, (for Ada was the name of the heroine,) and she determined to use every effort to gain her affection; but the others won it from her: and then Margaret, who had for long been getting more and more excited with the story,

and found more and more difficulty in reading aloud descriptions of what seemed to her her very own thoughts and feelings, fairly gave up the effort and burst into tears.

Blanch, so calm herself, always looked upon anyone in tears with a sort of awe as well as interest; and with a warmer feeling aroused in her heart for Margaret than she had ever experienced before, she flung down her work more energetically than was her wont, and throwing one arm round Margaret's neck, implored her to speak and tell her what was the matter. Margaret, however, could not speak at first; it was very rarely she gave way to these bursts of feeling, which her intellectual nature despised; but when she did, they were difficult to stop and subdue. She leant her head, buried in her hands, on the table, and sobbed for a few minutes in silence, yet comforted by the gentle soothing touch of Blanch's hand.

"O, Blanch!" she said at length, "I am so sorry you should have seen me so—you will think me so very silly; but that book so completely described what I have so very often felt, that it seemed to revive it all in my own heart. It is over now; never mind."

"But I *do* mind," said Blanch more tenderly than usual, kneeling down, so that her face came close to Margaret's, "I *do* mind. I know I am a poor comforter, to you especially, who are so much cleverer than I am; but if you don't dislike telling me what you are feeling, perhaps it might do you good."

"O, Blanch! and could you really care about me?" cried Margaret energetically: "is it possible? I have led a lonely life, as to any companions of my own sex and age at least; and I have always had the most fervent longing to make a real friend—one who would bear with the aspe-

rities and faults of my character, for the sake of the affection I am capable of bestowing, and love me while she tried to correct me. Oh, how I have *longed* for the day to come when I could speak freely and openly to anyone as I am doing to you now, Blanch," added Margaret, her eyes sparkling, and her head raised, and the current of her words flowing freely on with a certain spontaneous eloquence, (now they were unchecked by timidity or fear of displeasing,) which was irresistibly bewitching. "When my uncle brought me here I thought I should perhaps find the friend I have been longing for. I *did* find in Mrs. Seagrave a motherly guide and adviser, whose kindness I shall remember gratefully all my life; but when I looked round the girls for a friend, who was there? Penelope Fielding is so utterly common-place; and Primrose White so ill-tempered, and her sister so dull; and Emmeline Ord such a mere doll, (though very satisfactory to *look at* I allow;) who was there but you? and you—" Margaret stopped short, and her voice seemed about to choke again.

"And I," said Blanch, hiding her face in Margaret's lap, "felt so utterly inferior to you; saw that you considered me so stupid—"

"Oh, no, not stupid, Blanch! only cold—cold to *me*; and I doubted if I could ever be anything to you—you, loved and cherished, and *useful*—in a home-circle of parents and brothers and sisters—so ladylike, so orderly—such a pattern in so many ways; and *I*, wild, undisciplined, wilful; and if what some people call clever, yet, oh, so useless, so impulsive, so lonely!"

"Not lonely now!" cried Blanch; and tears for once stood in her calm blue eyes, as she took Margaret in her arms and kissed her twice, gently but very affectionately. "A friend, a valued friend to me, unworthy as I am of you. I will tell you

all my plans and prospects ; and you will be so useful to me."

"Useful!" cried Margaret in an enraptured tone ; but just at that moment the school bell rang to summon all the young ladies to tea, and for the first time since she had been there, Blanch had forgotten all about her toilet.

"Now, Margaret, hear me!" said Blanch the next day, having got her safe into the little dressing-room. "You must not discourage me in my attempts at writing, because I am doing it for an object. *You* say I have perseverance ; I will not shrink from any labour that will improve me ; I will follow your advice as implicitly as you could desire ; I will work hard and patiently, if but I may have a hope of success to cheer me on."

"You have the earnest purpose, at any rate," said Margaret, "which can, I believe, work wonders. Others may possess more discursive fancy, and stronger speculative powers ; but after all, why should we wish all intellects to be alike, any more than all faces ? But you promised to tell me all your plans!"

"We are very poor," said Blanch, raising her head, and looking Margaret full in the face with her clear blue eyes ; "very poor. There are many things we have to do without, which you have as a matter of course, and perhaps never think about even. My father has a small living, and a large family ; and of course, as we grow up, our education is more expensive in various ways. They can hardly afford to pay my expenses here ; but papa thought, and Uncle Mowbray thought too, it would be the best plan for me to learn things thoroughly ; and then I could perhaps teach my sisters, or even go out as a governess. That is why I have worked so hard here, because I felt I was having such great advantages, and that only for a short time.

When I went home last, I was more struck by the difficulties my father and mother had to contend with than ever before ; and I longed so much to help them, to try to return in some small degree all they had done and borne for me, that it seemed to put a fresh energy into me, a determination to struggle till I attained something. Getting the prize for that theme was a wonderful encouragement to me ; it made me feel it not impossible that I might get on in the path I was now choosing for myself—but this is a long story, Margaret."

"Go on ! go on !" cried Margaret ; " tell me all. I like to hear you so much !"

"Before that," continued Blanch, thoughtfully, "I never felt a hope of getting on in that line ; I thought myself so hopelessly stupid. I only wrote for the prize at all, because I felt it my duty to use every means of getting on ; but I had not the slightest expectation of succeeding ; I felt so delighted when it was pronounced mine. O, Margaret, you cannot realize what I felt ! Nobody can, I am sure, who has not suffered as much from their own want of quickness and cleverness as I have. Uncle Mowbray would never have given me the least encouragement if it had not been for that theme ; and Arthur liked it so much, I was quite delighted ; for *Arthur* is *really* clever, Margaret—not like me. I found he had been unhappy at school, poor fellow—been teased, and called mean for want of pocket-money ; and I saw he wanted clothes, and then I felt I must get some money somehow, and I sold Nero!"

"Oh, Blanch !" said Margaret, and her eyes lighted up with the same sort of sparkling, glistening, moist brightness which reading about some grand heroic trait of chivalrous valour was always wont to bring over them, "that was grand !"

"Oh no ! how could anything be *grand* in this

very common-place story I am telling you?" said Blanch humbly. "I know better than that! But I have thought, and thought a great deal; and it seems to me that I understand German better than I do anything else, and so I mean to begin a sort of 'Hand-book of German Literature,' a kind of book that would be useful to school-girls—not too deep, of course, because that *I* could not manage; but just a description of the best authors, and the sort of things they wrote, and a translation from each of them; in short, a real practical school book. Uncle Mowbray made me promise not to print anything till I am twenty; however, perhaps if *I should* succeed he will remove his veto. He has an old friend in London who is well acquainted with some of the great publishers there; and one of them told him school books sold better than anything (except cookery books I believe), and if Uncle Mowbray approves of mine, he will ask this friend to present it to the publisher to look over. Meantime I must set to work, only I have not got half the books I want down here!"

"It is a charming plan!" cried Margaret, enthusiastically. "Do let me help you! I could write you a grand preface, I am sure! a sort of essay! I have had a little more practice in that since our school theme. And as to books, I subscribe to Rolandi's, and I can get a box down from there at once to look over. O, Blanch, to think that I have so much money to spare, and so little to do! and you have so little, and so much to do with it; how odd it does seem!"

"I am afraid it does make one wish a little *too* much for money," said Blanch; "to see it so much wanted by those one loves, that is the worst of it. But it will be so kind in you, dear Margaret, to help me; and you will write at once for the books?"

"This very post," cried Margaret; "we will make out a list this minute. I *must* not give you any money, Blanch, I am afraid?" she added very timidly; "I suppose it is against the rules of this foolish world we live in; but it would be a great pleasure to me."

"Oh, no! that would never do!" cried Blanch; "you know it would not!"

"Well; but at least I may give you some books, Blanch. When we have looked over a great many, and seen what will really be most useful to you, I may give you a box of books. Nobody *can* say anything against that; or if it will make you happier, it shall be my uncle the archdeacon's present. He was always so afraid of my getting too learned; and was so delighted when you got the prize instead of me, that he said then he should like to give you a testimonial, and now let him do it."

"I will take them thankfully from *you*, dear Margaret," said Blanch. "I know it *will* be a pleasure to you to give them, and they will be indeed a treasure to me."

And so Margaret and Blanch set to work most energetically, and wrote lists and plans, and scraps of translations from the German, and studies for this said book; reading very industriously an hour or two every morning together in the little dressing-room, and daily becoming more interested in this grand scheme.

Thus their life went on rather monotonously externally for some weeks, but full of that mental interest, which prevents any feeling of dulness creeping over the heart. Then, rather a singular break occurred in it. Margaret was engaged in the school-room one morning, and Blanch was sitting in the dressing-room by herself hard at work, translating and polishing one of her "ex-

amples of style," Göthe's famous "*Fischer Knabe*." She had just succeeded in polishing up the first verse tolerably to her satisfaction, and was writing a fair copy of it—

“The swelling waters splashed up foam,
A fisherman sate by,
And gazed upon the fishes' home
With calm and earnest eye—”

when she was rather inconveniently interrupted by a knock at the door. “Come in!” she cried rather shortly, and the housemaid appeared.

“If you please, Miss Mostyn, there's a gentleman wants you in the parlour.”

“A gentleman!” cried Blanch in astonishment; “did he not give his name?”

“No, Miss Mostyn; he said he had brought news for you from home.”

“Mamma must be worse!” said Blanch; and she ran down in a fright, and found herself abruptly ushered into the presence of her father's pupil.

“Mr. Macdonald!” she exclaimed in utter astonishment; and then added hastily, in a tone of alarm, “I trust there is nothing the matter at home?”

“Oh, no! and they're all vera weel!” cried Morgan Arthur; “and I came—that is, I brought—I wished so much—and there he stopped short.

“Have you no letter from my father for me?” inquired Blanch, intending to help him; but the question appeared only to add to his confusion.

“Well, no, Miss Blanch; I never thought of that; and I'm sure it must seem very odd to you; and I don't know what to say now I am here. But I wished so very much to see you, and to bring you my tom-tits; and I would not ask the

minister, for fear he should say no ; so I just said I wanted three days' holiday to go and see a particular friend, and came away ; and I've walked all the way since six o'clock yesterday morning."

"O, Mr. Macdonald!" said Blanch, in a reproachful tone, "how could you ? I am so sorry, and so much obliged to you for the birds ; but we are not allowed to have pets at school ; and do you know, I am afraid there has been some mistake ?"

"Do just *look* at the little fellows !" cried Morgan Arthur, kneeling down on the floor, and proceeding to open the cage-door, he let out two beautiful little tom-tits, who proceeded with the utmost familiarity to run up his coat sleeve till they reached his shoulder, and nestled familiarly against his red hair.

"They are really very pretty," said Blanch, somewhat mollified ; and Morgan Arthur, detaching one from its hiding-place, and taking Blanch's little hand in his enormous paw, gently enticed the little bird to sit upon her finger. His attitude was peculiar, and simple and straightforward as Blanch was in manner and mind, it was not in woman's nature not to be a little disconcerted ; when at this critical moment Winifred Fielding flung open the door, and stopping short at the unusual spectacle which met her eyes, retreated with a giggle.

"What was that ?" cried Morgan Arthur, who was kneeling with his back to the door.

"It was one of my school-fellows who looked in," said Blanch, "and who has probably informed all the pupils by this time, of the unusual circumstance of a strange gentleman's having penetrated here ; and probably the German teacher is now on her way to Mrs. Seagrave's room ; and Mrs. Seagrave will, I dare say, soon be here."

"You don't mean it ?" cried Morgan Arthur,

suddenly starting upright, and thereby discomposing his tom-tit, who flew with a little sharp cry up into the window-curtain.

"Of course Mrs. Seagrave would be expected to see anyone who came to visit her pupils," said Blanch rather stiffly; "but before she comes, do explain to me why you gave me such a fright."

"Weel, and it was just a dodge of my own," replied Morgan Arthur, with a very self-satisfied air. "I thought perhaps they might be particular at the door, and that if I said I had come to you from home, I should have no difficulty."

"But," cried Blanch indignantly, "you have only added to your difficulties, I assure you, by this step!" and with a crimsoning cheek she turned away, and the little bird fled from her finger to join his companion.

"Dear! dear! but I'm always unfortunate!" exclaimed poor Morgan Arthur, with a very rueful countenance. "I never can understand exactly what other people would do."

The door opened, and Mrs. Seagrave entered, and looked at Blanch for an explanation; while she really could not trust herself to speak, for there was something which struck her as so infinitely comical in poor Morgan Arthur's panic-struck look, and the very low but awkward bow he made to her at her entrance, that she could hardly help laughing.

"Mr. Macdonald, Madam," said Blanch, as calmly as she could; "my father's pupil."

Mrs. Seagrave bowed, and hoped he had left Mr. and Mrs. Mostyn quite well.

"I brought the birds," stammered Morgan Arthur, in his extreme distress of mind, quite omitting the answer to Mrs. Seagrave's question.

"Birds!" said Mrs. Seagrave in astonishment.

"Yes, ma'am, *birds*; and there they sit," he re-

plied, pointing to the top of the window-curtain. "Miss Blanch knows!" but when he turned an appealing glance to the place where Blanch had been standing a moment before, he discovered to his extreme disgust that she had escaped from the room, and left him alone with Mrs. Seagrave.

"They're vera tame," proceeded Morgan Arthur, in his exceeding desperation, feebly clinging to the subject of the tom-tits, lest another should be introduced.

Mrs. Seagrave sat down calmly, and wondered what this might mean; but the excessive confusion of the young gentleman, and the sudden disappearance of the young lady, causing something like the truth to flash upon her mind, she with difficulty preserved her gravity while Morgan Arthur put his great hands into all sorts of positions expressive of confusion, and while the tom-tits twittered and twee'd, and flashed about the room, now shaking the lustres, now fluttering in their master's red hair, now swooping across his face, and now running along the window frames, and pecking vehemently at the glass.

"You will oblige me, Mr. Macdonald, by putting those little birds into their cage again," said Mrs. Seagrave.

Poor Morgan Arthur! he blundered over a footstool, and brought down a tiny table, in his hurried desire to obey; he felt himself reproved; he was afraid of Mrs. Seagrave, of her polished manner, of her chilling calm, and even of her beauty—so different from the girlish loveliness of Blanch.

He tried earnestly to obey; he whistled, he coaxed, he banned them in broad Scotch, he stole about the room after them, he crept under the table, all in vain. Mrs. Seagrave never spoke through all his efforts; and when at last he stopped and wiped his hot forehead, the provoking little

things popped into the open door of the cage of their own accord. This done, their master pounced upon the cage and shut them in.

"Sit down, Mr. Macdonald," said Mrs. Seagrave; and Morgan Arthur did as he was bidden, and having nothing to say, and nothing to do, heaved a tremendous sigh, and finished it with a sniff.

"You are Mr. Mostyn's pupil, I understand?" observed Mrs. Seagrave more pleasantly; and then she began to question him so cleverly, that Morgan Arthur felt like a baby in her hands; it was so pleasant to hear her speak at all, after her calm and reproofing silence, so delightful to find that she would condescend to examine into his conduct and his motives, that he suddenly passed from the extreme of reserve, to a confidence equally awkward; told her in answer to her leading question how he had concealed his intended visit from Mr. Mostyn; how he had given himself out as a messenger from Thorpe Mandeville; how he had caught a snake by the way, killed it, skinned it, and left the skin outside the door, thinking Miss Blanch might not care to have it; how he had been walking all day; and finally, how hungry he was.

Mrs. Seagrave upon this expressed her unqualified disapproval.

"Well, ma'am," replied the hopeful guest, "I'm just smothered in dust, I admit; but if I had had the foresight to bring a clothes brush, I would have made a *deifferent* impression;" and in a regretful tone he proceeded to say that if he had known, he would have brought a dress coat over his arm, "though where I could have put it on, unless in your porch," he proceeded, "is a soobject worthy of speculation."

"No coat that you could have appeared in,

would have made any difference as to the propriety of this visit," said Mrs. Seagrave.

"Well, ma'am, when Miss Blanch comes in again, I'll express my sorrow, if I will have offended."

"Miss Mostyn is not coming in again," said Mrs. Seagrave. "But I am sorry you are hungry, Mr. Macdonald; I shall ring for some refreshment."

"I don't feel half so hungry as I did," replied the simple-minded fellow in a rueful tone, for he was quite heart-sick to think of not seeing Blanch again.

A substantial joint of meat shortly appearing, together with a cold fruit tart, bread, cheese, and salad, it however appeared that Morgan Arthur must have been very hungry indeed, if he was now only half as hungry as at his first entrance; for he set to work, first saying his grace, (at the same time keeping upon the cold meat an affectionate eye of tender admiration,) and did then and there slowly and calmly store away such a vast quantity of wholesome food, that Mrs. Seagrave, who was only accustomed to the appetites of girls, felt considerable alarm for the consequences; and was exceedingly relieved when at length the young Scotchman laid his knife and fork across his plate, and devoutly said his grace aloud again.

"And now, Mr. Macdonald, I shall take leave of you," said Mrs. Seagrave, rising. "I advise you to get a bed in the village, and return to Mr. Mostyn to-morrow; I need scarcely say that I hope nothing of this kind will ever occur again. In fact, nothing but my belief that you will have the good sense never to repeat this experiment, induces me to pass it over so lightly."

"You are vera good, ma'am," replied the culprit doubtfully. "I don't think I'll have another *opportunity* to come before the holidays."

"Unless I have a promise that it never shall

occur again, I shall write to Mr. Mostyn," interrupted Mrs. Seagrave.

"But I have not had the pleasure to explain any of the circumstances," replied Morgan Arthur; "and really I'm thinking Miss Blanch might do worse."

"I have nothing to do with any circumstances but these," said Mrs. Seagrave, "that you called on my pupil without leave, and under false pretences. I desire this may not happen again."

Morgan Arthur after this hoped Mrs. Seagrave would let him leave a message for Miss Blanch.

No; Mrs. Seagrave must decline.

With an air of persecuted innocence he exclaimed on hearing this "No," "A weel, ma'am; it would be a vera innocent message, just my dear love, and I'll never forget her."

Mrs. Seagrave took no notice of this observation; but having rung the bell, said, "I will now wish you good evening, Mr. Macdonald." At the same instant the housemaid entered to show out the guest; and he, impelled by his hard fate, followed, and suffered the door to be shut behind him, but he artfully left the birds in their cage upon the drawing-room table.

Mrs. Seagrave said not a word to Blanch that night on the subject of this visit. She fed the little birds herself with eggs and bread crumbs, and was considering into whose hands she should consign them, when on entering the drawing-room the next morning, she found her cat gazing at them, and licking her lips, while the poor little creatures sat huddled together on their perch, shivering and staring piteously. She drove the cat away, and was about to feed them, when the housemaid brought in word, that the strange gentleman had sent a boy from the inn where he had slept, with some proper food for the tom-tits.

The boy was shown in, and exhibited a small paper bag full of maimed flies, which he said the gentleman had "ketched hisself for the tits; he swep' 'em off the winders, and knocked 'em down with a handkercher in no time," observed the urchin; "and he says the young lady must ketch 'em a gill-full of flies every blessed morning, ma'am, or else they'll die! And, ma'am, I'll do it for you as well as any boy, if you want it done—I'll do it for a halfpenny a day."

"Very well, you may," said Mrs. Seagrave; and the boy retired as happy as it is possible to be in this imperfect state. *A halfpenny a day!* that is to say, four gingerbread rolls, or ten bull's eyes, or eight marbles, or a sausage, or a pint of half-ripe cherries, or a dozen or so of sour apples, or a whiptop, or a ball of string, or a lot of tin tacks, every day of his life. Oh, the advantages of money! *A halfpenny a day!*

At twelve o'clock Mrs. Seagrave took the little creatures up stairs into the dressing-room, to which Blanch and Margaret had just returned, and desired the two girls to feed and take care of them for her. Blanch, who was bending over her writing, blushed deeply, and could not look up; Margaret took the cage, and tried not to smile, as she hung it up in the window among the roses. Not the least tendency to a smile showed itself on Mrs. Seagrave's face; she stayed to give the girls some directions about their lessons, and then retired remarking casually that she had nothing more to say; whereby Blanch understood that no further notice would be taken of the visit of the previous night, and she was grateful accordingly.

Time wore on, and the Christmas holidays approached; and Margaret one day gave Blanch a letter from her uncle to read, which contained a very polite and urgent invitation for her to return

with Margaret, and spend her vacation at the Archdeacon's, after which she was to return to Mrs. Seagrave's as a teacher of the younger classes, an arrangement kindly made by that lady, to enable her to fit herself for the life of tuition that lay before her.

Blanch's heart rather failed her at the prospect of a first Christmas away from home, and the thought of her sisters' despair; but on the other hand Margaret was so kind, and would help her so much with her German and translations, and she should be so sorry for a parting, that she was much tempted to go. Besides, seeing a new place, and country, was a strong inducement to one who had travelled so little as Blanch. And, quite in the back-ground of her motives, lay a nervous dread of meeting poor Morgan Arthur, who was reading so hard, her father said, that he would only spare time to go home for one week at Christmas. With his characteristic openness, he had confessed his whole excursion to Mr. Mostyn as soon as he got home, and with it made as solemn and proper a proposal for Blanch as could be done at his age. It appeared from his statement, that as far as family money matters were concerned—to use his own words to Mrs. Seagrave—"Really Miss Blanch might do worse." He was the only son of a most indulgent father, who was anxious he should marry early, and would welcome as a daughter any bride of his choosing, so long as she was a lady in herself, and moved in the same grade of society as Mr. Macdonald. Possibly Mr. Mostyn, as the father of such a large family, looked forward to Blanch's answer to the long and explicit letter he had written to her about a month after Morgan Arthur's visit, and on the subject of his wishes, with more anxiety than he chose to confess; but Blanch's answer so evidently showed

her conviction that no lapse of time would dispose her to love Morgan Arthur as she ought to love an accepted suitor, that Mr. Mostyn thought it wisest to quash the whole affair at once, and insist on Morgan Arthur's conducting himself in all respects as if it had never happened. He wrote to his daughter that she might safely come home, as before arranged, without fearing any annoyance from her disappointed suitor, who appeared to have recovered his spirits, and spent his time between trying to spoil little Alice (Blanch's likeness in the family) by the most devoted homage, and teaching a pet magpie to follow him about; but when Blanch informed her parents of Margaret's invitation, it appeared such an opportune method of at least delaying any little awkwardness there might be in her return home, that they at once recommended her acceptance of it.

Blanch and Margaret entered the park. It was a hard frost, and had been so for several nights. The lake was frozen over, and the water-fowl were standing dreamily on one leg, their heads under their wings, on the edges of the ice. The sun was shining brightly, and some firs, at the head of the lake, stood out clearly and distinctly against the blue sky. Margaret put her head out of the window. "There is Gerard!" she exclaimed, "skating; and I wonder who that is with him?" And as she spoke, two figures came lightly skimming along to the edge of the lake, and one of them waved his hat aloft, and made various signs of recognition. That was Gerard, certainly. Blanch could see his face now; and he seemed trying to see her, for he bent forward, as if to look beyond Margaret. "Who can it be?" repeated Margaret again as the carriage whirled on: "he is a very well-looking gentleman-like sort of man; but I have not the slightest recollection of ever having

seen him before!" But now the carriage had reached the house door, and the archdeacon himself appeared in the hall to welcome Margaret, and hand Blanch into the drawing-room with the punctilious courtesy of the olden days.

"Is anyone staying here, dear Uncle?" asked Margaret, as soon as there was a pause in the greetings. "I saw a stranger on the lake, I thought!"

"Ah! my dear! Yes, I have a visitor for you!" replied the archdeacon, with a merry twinkle of his black eye. "He and Gerard are great friends; he is a Mr. Stewart, a son of an old Indian friend of Gerard's; he has got a living a few miles from here only—Stanton Upland—and I asked him here for a few days, thinking it would not be so dull for him when we are favoured with Miss Mostyn's company!" he added with a low bow.

Blanch blushed, but no ready answer came to her lips, as it would have done had she been more experienced in the ways and manners of the world.

The archdeacon looked at her attentively with his bright little eyes. "Very pretty, I see," he said to himself—"quiet, not Frenchified, but lady-like." "Margaret, my dear, show Miss Mostyn her room, that she may rest a little before dinner," he added aloud; and Margaret marshalled Blanch up the oak staircase.

"Your study, Margaret!" cried Blanch; "may I have a sight of it before I dress or unpack?"

"Oh! never mind unpacking," said Margaret; "nurse will manage all that for you, with the help of Jane, the housemaid, the only young person in the house, (of the servants, I mean.) Just leave your keys on the dressing-table and follow me;" and Margaret sprang on so quickly, Blanch hardly could follow her—up another staircase, and all

along the upper corridor, and up the little staircase at the end, and into that strange artistic chaos of a room. It was little altered, except that now a large fire was burning, and crimson window-curtains and a brightly-coloured hearth-rug gave a little glow of colour in the room. Blanch gazed about her in surprise. "What a curious interesting room!" she exclaimed at last. "How much there is in it! What pretty things!"

"Wait a minute, and I will be back again!" said Margaret, rushing out as quickly as she had come in, and leaving Blanch to her own meditations. She looked about her eagerly. It seemed a sort of Fairyland that she had got into—so free, so untrammeled an existence as Margaret must lead here was quite a new phase of life to Blanch, and it seemed to enlarge her mind even to observe it. The room had been dusted this time, but Margaret's casts had been respected; and some of them were even placed on white plaster brackets, which Gerard had purchased for her one day from a travelling Italian boy, with bright insinuating black eyes. They looked down calmly upon Blanch as she glanced upon each in turn; and then fixed her gaze upon Gerard's broken angel head, which lay in a corner of the floor. A noise on the steps interrupted her; and in another minute Margaret flung back the heavy curtain which hung against the door, and admitted Nero, who came bounding up to his mistress, and danced round her, and wagged his tail violently, and finally put his huge paw into her lap, as Blanch sat down on the hearthrug to caress him better. "Dear old Nero!" she cried. "Oh, Margaret, how well he is looking!"

"Gerard has taken great care of him," said Margaret; "he is more his dog than mine, I think; and here he comes!" she continued, as Gerard's

light step came swiftly up the stairs; and he entered, and came quickly up to Margaret, both hands extended.

"Well, Polly! and so you are come back again?" he cried. "We have really missed you more than I expected! Will you not introduce me to Miss Mostyn?"

Margaret turned, and could not help laughing at Blanch's predicament: her face crimson with shyness and displeasure, at being caught in so child-like an attitude on this her first young lady visit. She was struggling with Nero, who, taking each attempt she made merely as an additional excitement to a game at play, now poked *both* his fore paws into her lap, and held her down with irresistible strength. "He *must* think her pretty now!" thought Margaret, as she saw Gerard contemplating the picture before him; but in another minute he stepped forward, and, with commanding look and touch, made Nero release his prisoner, and crouch at his feet. Blanch rose and curtsied her thanks, and the introduction was completed. Margaret vainly watched Gerard's features to discover what he thought of Blanch: she could detect nothing but one little bright gleam of amusement, when his eyes caught hers in the fact; and then he advised the young ladies to go and prepare for dinner, while he took Nero down stairs. Blanch wondered a little whether Nero would follow him; but he acknowledged the power of *man*, and obeyed without a murmur, even when Blanch and Gerard turned different ways in the long corridor!

Blanch's toilet was short and simple, but the delicate purity of her attire was what could never offend the most fastidious taste; and after looking her well over, Margaret decided that she looked best as she was, and would not offer her any of her own ornaments to wear. So they descended

together to the drawing-room, and the archdeacon introduced Mr. Stewart formally to them both. He was a tall handsome man, a little too pale, perhaps, if anything ; but his dark hair lay in wavy curls over a well-shaped brow ; and his voice was music itself—deep-toned *meaning* music.





CHAPTER IX.

SNOWY HOLIDAYS.

BOR some days it snowed so perseveringly that the girls did not go out, but spent two or three mornings up in Margaret's study, hard at work, and two or three evenings at the piano, when Mr. Stewart proved himself a very efficient help; he had a pleasant manner, Margaret thought, perhaps a little too firm, but this firmness was not displayed ungracefully: it seemed his nature to command certain characters; and there was so much uprightness about him, and such grave simplicity in his mode of using his powers, that Margaret did not at all grudge him his sway, the less so perhaps, because he never attempted to exert it over her. After the snow came a cold thaw and rain. Blanch now did begin to wish they could go out and enjoy themselves, but this weather defied them altogether; and the two girls took exercise upstairs in the long corridor, playing at ball with little Lewis (who had returned from school), and running up and down stairs to keep their feet warm.

Margaret was lamenting for the twentieth time to Blanch that it should be so dull for her, and Blanch was pressing her cheek against the window

of the upper room to see the sun go down under a few faint yellow clouds when Mr. Stewart came in and walked straight up to her, saying, "The rain has ceased, Miss Mostyn."

"Yes, I see," replied Blanch; "and it has riddled the snow full of holes."

"Grant and I have been sweeping a path on the terrace," he continued, "would you like to come out to it, and take a turn?"

"What, at sunset, Mr. Stewart?" exclaimed Margaret, surprised.

"Yes, it is not damp, and Miss Mostyn said at breakfast that she should go out as soon as the rain ceased."

Margaret was going to exclaim that Blanch would take cold when she saw so plainly by her face that she wished to go, that she merely said, "Well, Blanch, do you mean to venture?"

"Yes, I should like to do so," said Blanch.

"It is not so very cold," observed Mr. Stewart; "and, even if it were, the endurance of cold is good for the constitution; in fact," he added, "all endurance has a tendency to brace the nerves, both of mind and body."

"Patient endurance and resolute endurance, no doubt, you meant," said Margaret.

He gave her a meaning smile, and said, "I stand corrected;" then following Blanch with his eyes as she left the room to prepare for her walk, said, "In Miss Mostyn's character there will be both patient and resolute endurance when they are wanted."

"More than enough certainly to carry her through a snow-wreath," observed Margaret.

"But not enough to carry her through the trials of life?"

"I did not say so, Mr. Stewart. I agree with you that all endurance will brace her character: I only differ as to its bracing all characters—some it

softens. To say that some people are ‘softened by affliction,’ is both common and true, I think.”

Mr. Stewart mentally resolved that he would not again venture upon a general observation before Margaret; and he thought her too fond of giving her opinion, considering her youth and inexperience.

“ Shall you favour us with your company ?” he inquired.

“ I don’t know,” replied Margaret. “ Here is Gerard : he had better decide. Is it fit for me to go out, Gerard ?”

“ No, not at all ; you will catch one of your long coughs ; and it is not so very pleasant that you need wish to go. My uncle is there, and Lewis and Nero ; and with Mr. Stewart and that trio, Miss Mostyn will not want your escort also.”

“ I shall stay then,” said Margaret ; and Mr. Stewart was pleased, because this arrangement enabled him to have Blanch to himself.

When they were gone, Gerard and Margaret sat looking out at the dull sky, the soiled and sloppy snow, and the dark rustling trees, till Margaret said, “ Don’t stay *stupifying* here, Gerard. Why don’t you go and walk with the others ?”

“ I am tired of being out ; I have not sat down since lunch. What are you thinking of, Margaret ? or rather, what were you thinking of before you spoke ?”

“ How do you know that I was thinking of anything particular ?”

“ How do I know ? Because your face is like a book to me, very easy to read, and written in a familiar tongue. I happened to be reading it then.”

“ Indeed !”

“ Yes ; I saw that you were indulging in some very learned reflections, which were not untinctured with regret. What were they ?”

"I was thinking, Gerard, that I wish my future line of duty was as clearly sketched out for me, as that of Blanch is for her."

"A cowardly wish! If fulfilled, it would deprive you of the pleasure of striking out your path for yourself."

"But in the meantime," Margaret began, "I seem to have no place in the world."

"Don't be in too great a hurry, Margaret, to strike out a path; wait till you are sure you have found out the right one. It is the privilege of genius to have a long childhood. Your mind is not yet so matured as that of most girls of your age."

"You choose to take my genius for granted?"

"Yes; just as I do that ardent and yet vague desire to be useful, that I have seen in you for a long while. Do not be impatient: God will send you the opportunity in good time."

"A great deal of time has been wasted at school," observed Margaret.

"How can you say so! You may have added very little to your stock of knowledge, but you have learned method, self-control, and an outward calm of manner, which you will find of great value. You have learned to manage yourself, and without that you would never have been able to manage other people."

"Is it to be my mission to manage other people? Nonsense, Gerard!"

"Perhaps so; perhaps not. But, Polly, I pray you do not rave for a mission before your education is finished, and weary for usefulness before you are fit to guide others. It is too much the fashion now to want to do extraordinary things, and make extraordinary sacrifices. Half the girls one meets in society, and all the girls one reads of in books, want to be furnished with a mission, and

- never look for it under their feet, but always up aloft ; they try to climb, and then some of them tumble, and break their bones, and ever after they find it their decided mission to go upon crutches, poor tender things !”

“ Well, Gerard, I will wait and be humble ; but Blanch is only a few months older than I, and she has a mission !”

“ Only a few months ?—she is years older. I shall take a walk with her, and draw her out.”

“ Do, Gerard, and tell me what you think of her.”

After breakfast the next morning, Blanch having retired to her room to write, Gerard and Margaret found themselves down in the morning room, and Margaret soon interrupted his reading by asking, “ Well, Gerard, what do you think of *her* ?” for she had observed that according to his expressed resolution, he had been trying to draw Blanch out.

“ Your friend,” he answered ; “ is she your friend ?”

“ To be sure,” exclaimed Margaret.

“ Then, Polly, how can you expect me to give a candid opinion ? Your own mind is made up respecting her ; shall you thank me for a few dispassionate words ? No, I always let people’s friends alone ; I cannot see with your eyes, you know.”

“ I do not expect you to see with my eyes ; but do you not see a very pretty girl with your own ?”

“ Yes ; she is very pretty, calm, and self-possessed. I thought her face rather wanting in expression, till she got her netting stirrup entangled with that light little chair, and tumbled it over ; then, when Stewart helped her with it, and made matters worse, and upset her workbox, and threw her into a fit of bashfulness and blushing by his determined politeness, I thought her quite lovely ;

blushes and downcast eyes, and that shy smile, improved her infinitely."

"So you do admire her?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"And has she not a pleasant voice, Gerard? I think it a very sweet voice."

"Humph—no, I don't think it pleasant; it has not enough change for me; besides, it is too high a voice for my taste."

"Why, surely a woman's voice should not be deep, Gerard?"

"Certainly not. Do you remember how our dear cousins talked, Margaret? their voices seemed to reach no further than the mouth, and their words were formed on the very tips of their tongues: they talked with their lips. There was merely utterance, no richness, nothing impassioned, nothing earnest. Neither heartfelt emotion nor a sense of merriment or of joyance, could be expressed with voices like theirs. They said words, but they expressed no feelings. That kind of voice which resides farthest from the heart I like least. Then there is the kind possessed by your friend; she speaks from the throat. The tones are clear, pure, and have sometimes an agreeable cheerfulness; they express much gentle feeling, and are never thin or flippant; but neither are they capable of much impassioned sweetness, or varied harmony. The third kind of voice comes from the chest; it is very near the heart, and partakes of all its changes and passions: it is troubled, and trembles in sympathy with the heart; it has a rich, an always sweet and harmonious difference for all the changes, all the passions, all the emotions of the heart. It need not be deeper in tone than most voices, though it be deeper seated; welling up from among the heart-strings, always meaning great deal to the careful listener—never a

voice that obtrudes itself on the ear, but blends among others, and is lost when many are talking, and has no sharpness in it, but a rich softness like the murmuring lake, or the cooing of a dove. That is the kind of voice I like. I could spend hours in listening to it."

"Gerard," said Margaret laughing, "you are thinking of some voice in particular. I know you are."

"How do you know?" asked Gerard with a very conscious air, and looking like a detected man.

"Gerard, you need not ask how. I know: actually you are colouring; I did not think you could! Yes, I know whose voice you were thinking of—shall I tell you?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because you are mistaken, you do *not* know."

"Well, if I am mistaken, you can set me right; you were thinking of Henrietta."

"Margaret, it does not suit me to set you right, but I was not thinking of Henrietta."

"Not thinking of Henrietta?"

"No, you need not look so blank—so almost shocked—I suppose you believe me? I say I was not thinking of Henrietta."

"Then," said Margaret, with an audacious smile, "you ought to have been!"

"O, Margaret, what a true woman's answer. I really have nothing to say in reply."

"I am glad to see that you look a little out of countenance. What inconstant creatures men are!"

"What do you know about inconstancy, you neophyte? don't talk of what you know nothing about."

"Well, I will not, if you will let me talk about my friend."

"Begin then and talk. By the by, Polly, what do you think of your own voice?"

"I am not learned in voices, as you are. You can tell me what you think of it, if you please, and I will agree with you, provided you will listen to what I have to say about Blanch."

"Oh! it does not matter what I think then, or what I say about it: that being the case, I shall say nothing. Do you know, Margaret, that you have grown very much more womanly during this half year at school, and much more self-possessed. You are quite a grown-up young lady."

"On the contrary, Gerard, you appear to have grown younger, not quite so awful as you were when you first came home from India."

"So awful! what do you mean, child?"

"Oh, you said that like your old self."

"To be sure I am innumerable ages your senior, but I do not want you to feel that there is anything awful about me."

"No, Gerard, I promise you that I will not."

"You mocking spirit, what do you mean by that wicked smile? Is the child really making game of me?"

"Gerard, do you know that my uncle says he has decided against my going to school any more; and that, with the beginning of the year, I am to be the mistress of his house."

"Indeed, madam; then if you are to rule the house, excuse my saying that it will be a good thing for the master, guests, and servants, if somebody charitably undertakes to rule you. I know of but one person able and willing to undertake such a task."

"Able, did you say? I admit that I always obeyed you five months ago, Gerard; not because I thought it my duty, but because I could not help it."



"The most satisfactory reason for obeying; does it exist still, I wonder?"

"So you perceive, Gerard, that you will be, after next week, in a certain sense, *my guest*. I shall be delighted to entertain you, of course; and I hope you will make yourself at home."

"Impertinence!"

"Ah! I thought that would make you laugh—you need not pretend that this does not amuse and surprise you, for I know it does; you laugh in spite of yourself. You are extremely amused. You did not think I had sufficient of the rebellious spirit in me, and genuine impertinence, to say so—and to you?"

"Ah, Polly! and after all that I have done for you! but this ingratitude is the way of the world."

"So they say; and now, as I *am* a grown-up lady, (for you agreed that I was yourself,) of course we are equals; except that you will naturally treat my opinion with more deference than I can bestow upon yours, because of my sex."

"Hold, enough! I give in—I am worsted."

"Yes, just for the present, you are; but in five minutes, perhaps, you will call me child, or Polly, or some other name that I don't want to go by; and you will assume your old dictatorial manner; and I shall unconsciously obey, and then Blanch will laugh at me."

"Blanch again! I am jealous of Blanch. Why are all your thoughts and affections to be bestowed upon her?"

"How ridiculous you are, Gerard; I might say then that I will be jealous of Henrietta."

Gerard on hearing this made a grimace that would have surprised Margaret, if she could have seen it; and he got up and walked about the room with considerable impatience.

"Polly," he began.

"Polly again," repeated Margaret.

"Well, Margaret then, Margaret Grant, Margaret, whom I care for very much, my cousin, and my intimate friend, I have something to say to you."

"Very well, Gerard, my cousin, who taught me Greek long ago, and teased me and played with me, and wants to do so still; my dear Gerard, I am quite ready to hear it."

"It is about Henrietta."

"O—!"

"What a long exclamation, and all done with the help of the little vowel, Margaret. What a fund of curiosity you must have in you; your eyes open and expand themselves into two round O's, and your mouth becomes another round O, to sympathize with them."

"Because I am so very anxious to hear about Henrietta."

"Why, Margaret?"

"Because, Gerard, of course I take a great interest in what concerns you so nearly; and I do not like to know nothing whatever of this lady but her name."

"You take a great interest in me, do you?"

"You know I do!"

"How much interest, Margaret?"

"More than in anyone in the world, excepting in my uncle."

"What, more than in Blanch?"

"Yes; so now tell me about Henrietta."

"I cannot, Margaret: let me think a little, and consider whether I can."

"Oh no, Gerard, that is not kind; you did say you would tell me. Come, speak."

"Give me five minutes, and then I will tell you, if I can."

So Margaret took up her work, and five minutes,

ten minutes, even a quarter of an hour, passed, and Gerard had not said a word. Margaret lost herself in endless speculations as to who and where this mysterious Henrietta might be, and she became so much interested in them, that the time, in spite of Gerard's silence, did not seem long; but she spoke to him at last, and he looked up from his reverie with a smile.

"Gerard, are you ready to tell me?"

"No; you must forgive me, I have changed my mind."

"Oh, you are not kind; you raised my expectations, and now you look particularly pleased, though you must know what a disappointment you cause me by not satisfying them."

"I am particularly pleased."

"You look as if you were lost in a maze of happy thoughts—as if Henrietta might have come (invisibly to me) and whispered something pretty in your ear."

"You have described what I feel; but besides that, I feel a prick in my conscience. I am like a receiver of stolen goods, I have got something on false pretences—at least, something given under a mistake, and it keeps me silent."

"You should have thought of that 'something' before you proposed to take me into your confidence," said Margaret reproachfully.

"So I would have done if I had been gifted with prescience; but, seriously, Margaret, I perceive that I have no right to tell you."

"But may I ask you one, just one, simple question respecting her?"

"I cannot answer one question, simple or complex, without deceiving you. I did fully intend to tell you all, and I was prepared for anything you might reply; but, trust me, it teases, puzzles, and disappoints me much more not to tell, than it does

you not to hear; and yet I am mistaken in every opinion that I have ever formed about you, if I shall not vex and annoy you when I do tell you."

"O, then you mean to tell me some day?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I must be contented then; and I shall puzzle over this when I am alone, and try to solve the enigma."

"Yes, that will be fair; and if you can solve it for yourself, Margaret, I shall be glad."

"You are the most extraordinary person I ever knew, Gerard. By the by, perhaps you know that I have seen her portrait—Henrietta's portrait?"

"Nonsense, Margaret!"

"You should not leave your portfolio about, if you wish to keep it unseen. I opened it, and then found a lovely face, nearly the loveliest I ever saw, (your doing the picture was,) and under it, in your own handwriting, her name: there were several other portraits, all evidently of the same person, and all as beautiful as they could be."

"Confirmation strong as death!" muttered Gerard. "I am caught in my own toils, and it serves me right. Well, Polly, I admit that you are a grown up young lady now—more than a match for me, my former pupil, and my sometime playfellow."

"I do not see why you need sigh so deeply for that," said Margaret, struck by his tone of regret; "people must always grow up, you know, if they live long enough."

"I shall go to my horse; in his company I shall be master still."

"And I shall go to my friend then; she will not puzzle me with enigmas."

Accordingly Margaret ran up stairs, and found Blanch hard at work, but with a radiant face.



There was something exceeding attractive about Blanch, certainly ; the sweet serenity of her manner seemed in some degree to impart itself to those with whom she associated, and her quiet steady earnestness of purpose could not but win her respect.

Margaret sat down to help her with her translations, and Blanch sometimes put down her pen to indulge in a little talk about her brothers and sisters, and her hope that she should eventually be able to help them onward. This hope was the constant stimulus to her exertions ; and Margaret sometimes almost wished that a like necessity could help her forward, for she fancied that her life was very much wasted. Yet one day when she expressed this feeling to her kind old uncle, he looked surprised, and remarked that he thought there had been a great improvement in her during the past half year ; so much so, that he might now say he was quite satisfied with her. "In short," he added, appealing to Gerard, who was present, "I think we may now consider her to be quite like other people : eh, Gerard, don't you think so ?"

Gerard would have considered, perhaps, if he had not been taken by surprise ; as it was, his answer slipped out rather hastily, "No."

"No !" repeated the Archdeacon, and Margaret looked disappointed.

"I do not think her like," repeated Gerard, "either in her faults or her good qualities ; but I should think, on the whole, her past has been less unlike than her future will be."

That was not a consoling view to put forth, and Gerard was sorry for what he had said when he observed that both the Archdeacon and Margaret were disappointed. He tried to turn the conversation to another topic, and took Blanch into it ; but the Archdeacon was not to be diverted. He

presently appealed to her whether Margaret were not improved, and received a ready and warm assent; but when he next inquired whether she was not like other people, he again got his former answer, "No, sir, I do not think so."

"Well, Miss Mostyn," was the reply, "then give her as much of your companionship as you can, and she will not fail to grow like other people; or rather, she will become what other people ought to be."

"Am I so very common-place, Mr. Archdeacon?" asked Blanch with a smile.

"There," observed Gerard, "you see, Uncle, that Miss Mostyn is not contented with your view of her character!"

"No; I very much wish to be different, altogether different from other people."

"Better?" suggested Gerard.

"Yes, better: there is no harm, I hope, in the wish to be better."

"Nor in the wish to be cleverer," continued Gerard.

Blanch blushed. "If I wish to be clever," she observed, "I think it is not from an utterly unworthy or selfish motive."

"No, certainly not; nor if you wish to be independent, more so than most of your sex, is it from a bad motive either."

"Do not make any reply to that remark of Gerard's," said Margaret; "he has no privilege for finding out your character and motives."

"I do not mind answering," said Blanch; "I do wish to be independent."

"Ah, I knew it. What a pity it is that people will perversely determine never to wish for the right things."

"Well, well," said the Archdeacon, not quite understanding these remarks, and willing to close

them by a moral sentiment, "there is no doubt, my dear Margaret and my dear Miss Mostyn, that you ought to cultivate a contented spirit. What does Solomon say? 'A contented mind is a continual feast.'"

No reply was attempted to this speech. Nothing stops an uncomfortable conversation like a general observation which is intended to apply to the case it supposes, but which is in reality felt to be utterly wide of the mark!

But this chronicle would grow to an undesirable length if it contained detailed accounts of all the Christmas festivities; suffice it to say that never had the guests at Thorley enjoyed themselves so much, and never, as all the school-children declared, had they seen anything so beautiful as the soft yellow and pink and green moons hung up on the Christmas tree, these moons being made by Blanch—large turnips duly scooped out, and coloured with saffron, with beet-root juice, and verjuice.

All this was over, and the girls had wished each other a happy new year, and Mr. Stewart had made himself very agreeable and very necessary, and Gerard had risen in Blanch's estimation into a higher position than ever young man of twenty-seven could have considered his due, before there was anything like a subsiding into ordinary occupations; and then Mr. Stewart, having been once introduced to the strange old room in the roof, often made one of the party; and when Margaret found that the translations and other occupations did not go on quite so well as heretofore, she was a very little annoyed, and Gerard rather amused.

"I have taken so very much pains in helping her, and it has been such a delight to me to do it," observed Margaret.

"I thought you considered that you were of no particular use to anyone," said Gerard coolly,

"and now you seem to be taking some credit to yourself for being of use here."

Margaret laughed, and said, "Of course it is *pleasant* to be of use to my own friend; and when I have said I wanted to be of use, I did not mean in such little matters as this."

"Nor such little matters as being of use to Tom Billiter's child? By the by, I see you have made her some warm winter clothes; and, Margaret, I hear that you teach her after breakfast in your own room every day?"

"Yes, I do; but that is for my own pleasure; she would lose so much that she has learned if I taught her nothing during the holidays."

"Also, I understand that you are working a considerable reform in the housekeeping department, Margaret—among the fish-kettles and the jam-pots, eh, Polly?"

"Yes; *but* then, you know, when my uncle told me I should be the mistress of his house, I knew that would entail upon me, with the honour of ruling, the undoubted duty of seeing that his affairs were properly attended to."

"I do not know what you mean by that '*but*.' How does it affect the question?"

"In this way, that I cannot be so absurd as to congratulate myself on being *useful*, because, while enjoying the advantages of rather an enviable position, I am not neglecting the duties which must go with those advantages. Besides, Gerard, I did think at first that I should specially detest those housekeeping duties, and do you know, I had no sooner really given my mind to them and thrown myself into them, than they turned to pleasures, and now I really like them."

"Poor thing! her duties all turn to pleasures on her hands, and try as she will, she *cannot* be a heroine!"

"I don't want to be a heroine, Gerard!"

"You do, Polly, you know you do!"

"I declare I never feel *in the least* like one, excepting when *you* are teasing and tormenting me, and laughing at me, and making me see that I am a ridiculous girl."

"How does that make you feel like a heroine? I should have thought it would have had a contrary effect."

"Not at all; I then feel that I have something to bear. Now, heroines always have a great deal to bear."

"Margaret, just look me in the face, will you, and answer me one simple question?"

"There is no difficulty in looking at you, certainly; and I shall know whether to answer your question when I have heard it."

"What I want you to tell me is this—whether, upon your honour as a lady, you really wish me to leave off teasing you? Now, don't laugh—speak!"

"Well, now I come to reflect on the matter, perhaps I would rather you did *not* leave it off; though I declare I found your raillery very hard to bear at first, though I was comforted and sustained in doing it by a strong sense of duty!"

"Ah, you are in a hopeless case indeed! I pity you; here is another duty turned into pleasure!"

So ended this conversation: it left Margaret much amused, and Gerard more and more forgetful of Henrietta.



CHAPTER X.

CHANGES.

"Thyself thou gav'st, thy own work then not knowing,
Or me, to whom thou gav'st it, else mistaking ;
So thy great gift, upon misprision growing
Comes home again, on better judgment making."

SHAKESPEARE.

BLANCH was to return to Mrs. Seagrave's alone. The Archdeacon found he could not part with Margaret, and she must remain as lady of his house.

Margaret had a strong suspicion, caught perhaps from Gerard, that there was one who would gladly have seen Blanch likewise remain, and when the last morning came, she listened throughout breakfast-time for an arrival. At last, through the open dining-room door, she heard Blanch's calm voice in the hall say, "How do you do, Mr. Stewart?"

"There, he is come," thought Margaret, with a sigh of relief; and she shut the dining-room door, that if Mr. Stewart had anything to say, he might have two or three minutes to say it in before the servants brought down the luggage.

She thus shut herself in with Gerard, the Archdeacon, and little Lewis; and while she used what little feminine arts she possessed to amuse her uncle and keep him from wanting to leave the

room, which he had shown some disposition to do, Gerard made shorter work with his little brother.

The child, now that prayers were over, wanted to go and play, and had his hand on the lock of the door when Gerard called him. "I was only going for my skates," he pleaded, still on the point of opening it.

"Leave the door alone, and come to me," said Gerard.

The boy did so, and was straightway desired to sit down on a low chair near, and not stir from it till he was bidden.

But as Margaret's utmost powers of amusing could only keep her uncle in the room about five minutes, Margaret and Gerard followed him into the hall, and Gerard released his little brother, while the Archdeacon exclaimed, "There now, Margaret, I thought the carriage had come round! Have the servants brought down the boxes?"

"There they are, dear uncle; Mr. Stewart is seeing them put on!" exclaimed Margaret, anxious that he should not make any remarks which would show that she had been trying to detain him.

But nothing escaped Mr. Stewart. He no sooner looked at Margaret, than she felt that he knew of her little ruse, and understood it all.

Blanch now began to make her adieux, and went through them with wonderful firmness till she came to Margaret, and then the two girls shed a few agitated tears; but a remark from Gerard that the roads were very heavy, and they might miss the train if they did not start immediately, made Margaret very anxious to see Blanch off at once, for if she did not catch that particular train she would not be met at her journey's end.

So, with one more kiss from Margaret, Blanch was handed into the carriage by Mr. Stewart, and Gerard got in after her, for he was to see her safe

into the train. Mr. Stewart departed, and Margaret felt annoyed with all the world, and inclined to believe herself ill used!

She hoped much from Blanch's next letter—but it was a pleasant affectionate one, and contained no confidence! "I shall make a point of writing once a fortnight," she said; and write she did, keeping precisely to the day. Somehow Margaret would have preferred irregularity! She felt that writing to her was one of Blanch's duties, and that the letters came because it was the right day, not because there was anything to say, or because there was a desire for sympathy. And if ever so busy, still she wrote, though with manifest inconvenience! Margaret would at first often write twice to her once, and sometimes did not answer her letters in due form. Then Blanch was surprised. She could not understand the sudden impulse of affection that made it sometimes a necessity to write so fully, nor did she know that she occasionally said things in her letters that brought the old shy fits over Margaret, and prevented her for a while from writing at all!

Blanch returned home for the summer holidays, trusting that Morgan Arthur would have finished his education; but the first news she met was, that though he was gone home at present, he had induced his father to let him stay on another year; and the whole family expected her to think this a cause of infinite rejoicing. In fact, as House-keeper Carrie, now burthened beyond her years, told her sister, the family could hardly have paid their way without the assistance that his handsome payment afforded: indeed, Carrie had learnt that every want that he perceived was sure to be supplied, if his tact could devise a means of causing his gifts to be accepted.

Mrs. Mostyn was far more helpless and suffering, and the cares of the whole house rested on Carrie, who could not but be thankful for all the dainties that Morgiana, under colour of quaint experiments in natural history, would procure for the invalid. Fish from the river, grouse from his father's estate, and wildfowl from the meadows, had been brought to tempt the sick appetite ; and Blanch found that "Mr. Macdonald" must be regarded as "the family hero," who filled everyone's mind, and was always apropos to everything, quite eclipsing all that she had to tell of her Christmas visit.

But before long Blanch's Christmas visit became prominent in everyone's imagination. Mr. Stewart had been presented to an Indian chaplaincy, and wrote to Mr. Mostyn, asking permission to pay his addresses at Thorpe Mandeville.

It soon was elicited that Blanch's sole scruple was caused by her resolution to assist her family ; and Mr. Stewart quickly removed this by offering to take out Arthur and Charlie with them, and find employment for them among relations of his own who had interest there.

Like a dream all was settled, and Margaret learnt that Blanch was to be separated from her by half the world !

About the same time that Blanch had gone home, the Archdeacon had had a fit of the gout, and Margaret was fully occupied in attending to him, so that not only were she and Gerard less together than usual, but she had not nearly so much time for study as she had been accustomed to spend in it ; and when her uncle recovered, Gerard set out on a series of visits among his first and second cousins, which occupied him for six weeks. Then he returned, and he and Mar-

garet had some pleasant days together. Gerard's head was full of his lectures, and Margaret was delighted to help him with them; so though they frequently had little arguments, they were on the whole advancing in each other's good opinion, till one morning, when Margaret happened to sit some time in a dreaming mood over a letter that she had just received from Blanch, Gerard said to her, "What are the bridemaids to wear, Margaret, on the great occasion?"

"The plainest white and blue bonnets."

"Oh," said Gerard, "I thought it was the thing now for bridemaids to wear veils."

"Nothing that is 'the thing' will be done at Blanch's wedding," replied Margaret; "it would be too expensive; and Blanch is so prudent and so considerate, that I have no doubt she chose her sisters' dresses entirely with a view to their being useful afterwards."

"Ah, she is a paragon, no doubt," observed Gerard; "but, Margaret, you will not look well in blue trimmings."

Margaret smiled. "Nurse always declares that I look charming in everything," she answered; "and as she is the only person who thinks much about it, what a good thing it is that she should so much approve my appearance!"

"The only person who thinks about it! Have not I just been showing that *I* think about it?"

"Oh yes, you sometimes say how unbecoming such and such things are, and such dresses; you remark my appearance when it is not to be commended, just as my uncle remarks on the dinner when it is not to his mind."

So saying, Margaret began again to apply herself to her letter, which was crossed, as are those of many young ladies.

"Miss Mostyn has chosen a particularly inconvenient time for her wedding," said Gerard coolly.

"I always thought you were prejudiced against Blanch," said Margaret half reproachfully; "you cannot see her good qualities, nor even her beauty, as—as—"

"As Stewart does? No, I am humbly thankful to say that I do not see her in the light that Stewart does."

Margaret laughed. "It would be quite unpardonable in *you* to see her in the light that Mr. Stewart does," she replied, "and I did not mean to affront you by supposing such a thing possible."

"What," said Gerard, with evident irritation, "am I never to escape from that odious subject—that—that—I must have been an idiot to mention it—a downright fool! Bah! I hate myself for such folly!"

Margaret looked up amazed. Gerard walked to the other window of the breakfast-room, flung his arms on the ledge, and gazed out at the dripping trees and sodden grass with a flashing eye, and an angry flush over his brow.

"Well," thought Margaret, "this is strange. I wonder what that poor girl Henrietta would feel if she could see this, and hear an allusion to her called 'odious'! Surely she has not broken off with him, for I have not observed lately any absence of his usual spirits."

Margaret folded up her letter. "If anything has happened to make him doubt her constancy," she thought, "I can easily forgive his little outbreak of temper." Accordingly, when Gerard came back from his scrutiny of the garden, and said he was sorry he had spoken so angrily, Margaret was as gracious as ever, and during breakfast took care to be more attentive than usual to what he said. She even concealed her trouble when the Archdeacon remarked that his sister-in-law, Mrs. Maitland, having written to him to say that she was in

London with her daughter Harriet, he thought it would be only friendly to ask her to come and stay awhile with him.

"What do you think, Gerard?" he asked.

"Think, sir?" repeated Gerard, feeling that the question was an awkward one; "oh—it is not long since the Maitlands were here, is it?"

"Three years since Mrs. Maitland came down," was the reply, "full three years; and I cannot say, 'Come yourself, and leave your daughter behind you.'"

"No, of course not, uncle," said Margaret. "Then you think it necessary to ask Aunt Maitland?"

"Well, not necessary perhaps, but friendly, proper, and becoming between relations. Let me see, I promised that you should go and pay Mrs. Seagrave a visit in the autumn."

"Yes, uncle," said Margaret, a little dismayed; "but it wants a long time to the autumn, summer is not over yet."

"To be sure," proceeded the Archdeacon, slowly plodding over his breakfast, "a long time; plenty of time for the visit without interfering with your seeing Mrs. Seagrave, my dear."

Gerard and Margaret exchanged glances.

"Then shall I write to her, and say you send your love, and shall be happy to see her and Harriet for a fortnight or so on their way home?" asked Margaret.

"A fortnight," repeated the Archdeacon; "did I say a fortnight, pussy?"

"No, uncle," replied Margaret, blushing; "I only suggested it."

"Oh, well, do not mention the time; say a short time, that will do; I think it hardly seems civil to limit a relation in that way."

So Margaret wrote sorely against her will, to ask her aunt and cousin to come and stay a short

time at Thorley. "If they only stay a month," she thought, "I shall think myself fortunate."

The invitation was accepted; Mrs. Maitland and her daughter arrived. The former was a small person, looking very young for her age, and having eyes that were quite remarkable for their penetration and expression of curiosity.

"Well, my dear, I hope you will stop awhile with us on your way westward," said the hospitable Archdeacon.

"Thank you, thank you. Another time we shall be most happy, but now we absolutely must be at home this day week."

Margaret heard this with exultation of heart; but if she could have known what a world of mischief might be done in a week, and would be done, she would not have been able to welcome her aunt with the cordiality which this assurance of her short sojourn now made easy and sincere—she really was very glad to see her *for a week*.

Mrs. Maitland's eyes were everywhere, and her powers of insinuation were without limit. She had not been three days in the house before she had seen the great improvement in the table kept, and in the order and comfort maintained; and by her remarks she had made the Archdeacon uneasy as to whether he was not living in too much luxury; whether a worldly love of display was not beginning to pervade his house; whether his old servants were not overworked; and whether Margaret was not departing from the Christian simplicity that he loved, in giving such handsome dinner parties.

But on the fourth day, when the old man's faith in Margaret as a housekeeper was somewhat shaken, and his upright mind was filled with doubts and fears, Mrs. Maitland turned her remarks to another subject; and though she touched

it delicately, she gave so much more pain than she had intended, that she never ventured to approach it again with him, though "a strong sense of duty" (as she said, and no doubt thought) impelled her to mention it first to Margaret, and then to Gerard.

"For you know, my dear Margaret," she observed, as they were walking one evening in the shrubbery after the late dinner, "he is a very fine young man."

"Gerard?" replied Margaret. "Yes, he is."

"Why, whom could I mean but Gerard?" said Aunt Maitland. "We were talking of him, were we not? Indeed," she added, with a little laugh, "we almost always are talking of him."

"Yes," said Margaret coolly; "you know you have been very anxious to hear all about him, aunt."

"I?" replied Mrs. Maitland, laughing again; and then she added, "Well, but one ought not to laugh at these things, they certainly are no laughing matter."

Margaret was mute with surprise.

"And that reminds me, Margaret, my dear," said her aunt with engaging frankness, "that though being thrown so very much with your cousin, you may not be able to prevent that (shall we call it preference?)—that feeling, in short, from growing up in your mind; yet, my dear girl, it would be more becoming, more maidenly, to conceal it a little; not, at least, to show it so openly."

Margaret was very angry. She answered with great heat, "Aunt, you are perfectly wrong; I have no such '*preference*' as you suppose. I do not care the very least in the world for Gerard in that sense, and never should under any circumstances;" and the "odious subject" was on the very tip of

her tongue, when remembering what mischief might be made if she mentioned it, she was suddenly silent.

"Well, my dear," said her aunt, still with provoking blandness, "no doubt I am wrong, no doubt we are all wrong; then if it is so, my dear, and you do not care particularly about Gerard, I would not show such very great annoyance when the subject is mentioned, because, though I am perfectly satisfied with this denial, another person might interpret differently this heat, and these violent blushes."

Margaret was extremely angry, but she had sense to see that her aunt, in spite of all she might say, did think she had a "preference" for Gerard, and that nothing would be more likely to confirm her in this notion than very great anxiety on her own part to defend herself; so she walked beside her in angry silence, till suddenly calling to mind the expression, "no doubt we are *all* wrong," she turned towards her, and stopping short, repeated the words, and asked her aunt what she meant by them.

"My dear," said Mrs. Maitland, "I have no secrets from my dear girls, and they have none from me." The tone of her aunt's voice seemed to say, "I and my dear children are injured by the supposition that it could be otherwise, but I forgive you, Margaret."

"I do not see how this applies to the point, aunt," said Margaret.

"You cannot suppose that you and your affairs are never discussed, my dear," said Mrs. Maitland. "You, no doubt, talk of others in their absence, and among others, of my dear girls." This was a home thrust, and Margaret felt abashed. "No doubt you have often discussed them and their prospects, their manners, their opinions, &c.; and,

just in the same way, they of course have discussed yours."

"Of course," Margaret brought herself to say; and for the first time in her life, she fully felt the certainty that she was discussed in her absence just as she had talked of the Maitlands with Gerard. "They had no right to say that I—" she began.

"My dear," interrupted her aunt hastily, "they had a right to say what they chose to their own mother in confidence. What people see they will reason upon—they will, in short, believe."

"I do not object to their believing, or to your believing what you see; but I do object to your believing what you do not see," said Margaret.

"And no one can judge of what I have seen but myself," observed Mrs. Maitland.

"You could not see what had no existence," persisted Margaret.

"My dear," said Aunt Maitland, still with unruffled serenity, "we had much better talk of something else, for this subject only vexes you."

This was said just as Mrs. Maitland and Margaret reached the end of the garden walk, and turned. Margaret's feelings of vexation and displeasure now gave way to her old uncomfortable shyness, for advancing towards them were Gerard, Harriet, and the Archdeacon.

Gerard had Harriet on his arm; and when the latter exclaimed, as they met, "Why, Margaret, you look as I used to feel when I was a little girl, and had been allowed to play in the orchard!" Margaret felt that she should have liked to begin to cry, so vexed was she at her expression of countenance attracting such instant attention.

"Did you feel anything very peculiar when you had been playing in the orchard?" said Gerard, amused at her speech.

"To be sure I did, Gerard ; I generally felt that I had got an apple in my pocket."

"Oh, for shame, Harriet, my dear ; I could not have believed that a child of mine would have taken fruit without leave," exclaimed Aunt Maitland, laughing, but betraying secret vexation.

"This confidence has come very late, aunt," Margaret could not help saying ; "but, considering the nature of it, you could not have expected to possess it in Harriet's childhood." So saying, she went to her uncle's side, and drew his arm into hers, leaving Harriet with Gerard and her aunt.

Margaret's colour was high during the remainder of that walk, and when the party returned to the house, she gladly ran up to her own room, shut herself in, and began to think. She paced its ample length for a long while, and as her thoughts grew more energetic, and her projects more defined, her steps became quicker and quicker. At last, catching a passing sight of her face in a glass, she was ashamed to be reminded that she was still arrayed in her walking-dress, and she hastily went down to her dressing-room.

But as some days are uncomfortable days from dawn to dusk, this day was one that was to be consistent with itself ; in coming quickly down, she met some one coming quickly up, and she and Gerard ran against each other in the doubtful light.

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Gerard. "What, is it you, Margaret ? I hope you are not hurt?"

"Not at all, thank you," said Margaret, with a more distant tone and manner than was customary with her ; and she was about to pass, when Gerard took her hand, and said, "I want to speak to you for a moment, Margaret ; you are not in a hurry, are you ?"

"Yes, I am rather," said Margaret, inwardly trembling; "but I can wait a moment."

"What, on the stairs?" said Gerard, drawing her away. "No, come to the corridor window."

Margaret reluctantly allowed him to take her there, and thought to herself, "I only hope my aunt will not see this conference."

"Now I can see you," observed Gerard, as she stood with the light of the stormy sunset on her face.

He sat down on the window-seat, and looked earnestly and attentively at her, while she gazed at the ruddy sky. At last, without looking at him, she said, as coldly as before, "Well, Gerard?"

"I can say nothing," he replied, "if you will not look me in the face."

Margaret made an effort to do what was required of her, but her eyes seemed glued to the sinking sun; at last she withdrew them, and they flashed suddenly upon him with all their spirit and brilliancy. As he sat with his back to the light, she could scarcely see his face; but having endured the ordeal of his gaze, as she thought, long enough, she at length said, "Are you satisfied?"

He answered, folding his arms and sighing, "No; but I am convinced."

It was growing darker every moment, and the last ray of light faded from Margaret's forehead. Gerard sat still in an attitude of dejection, and Margaret stood before him. She felt as if spell-bound, and knew not what to say, what to do, or what to think. At last, overpowered with agitation, partly the result of her aunt's conversation, partly of his scrutiny, she burst into tears, and exclaimed, sobbing, "O, Gerard, do let me go, I am tired, I—I am cold!"

Gerard started up on hearing these childlike words, and seeing her strange, her almost childish

behaviour. "Tired," he repeated in a dreamy tone, "and cold! Poor child!" and taking her chilled hand, he led her towards her room. "There," he said, as he stopped before the door, "I will not oppress you thus any more, my sweet Margaret. I see you are younger than I ever thought you; and as for me, I am older than I ever felt before."

Margaret thought all this very odd, and having reached the shelter of her own room, she cried till her eyes were red, the element of bitterness in the late encounter being the dread lest her aunt should have mentioned her in such a way before Gerard as to put it into his head that she felt a "preference" for him. "She must have done," said Margaret, sobbing, to herself; "and it was very ungenerous and very ungentlemanly of Gerard to subject me to that scrutiny; he shall know that I think so before long."

In two days Margaret knew that she should be released from the irritating presence of her aunt; and never before had two days seemed such a long period to look forward to. How could she pass through them with her aunt's eyes constantly upon her, and with the harassing idea that Gerard had been taken into that foolish relation's confidence.

Margaret was very angry with her and with him, but specially angry with herself; she wondered how she could possibly have been so silly as to shed those tears and to be so childish. "I am more a child than ever!" she exclaimed bitterly. "Oh, I am sure my folly has helped to make Gerard believe my aunt's insinuations! My conduct might well make him feel that I am young and inexperienced, but he need not have taken such pains to inform me that he feels older than ever! Unkind! but I will undeceive him."

It was just nine o'clock, and Margaret came

down to make tea: a not unnatural feeling of indignation enabled her to conduct herself with a degree of dignity and coldness which she could not have obtained but under the pressure of circumstances like these. Her aunt, who probably was aware that she had gone too far, seemed now anxious to be particularly cordial; and Harriet was a complete cipher in her mother's presence, so much so, that Margaret sometimes could hardly believe that this was the same Harriet who in the previous summer had made herself so conspicuous in their little family circle. As for Gerard, he was very silent all the evening; and if it had not been for the Archdeacon, who saw nothing unusual in the scene, and chatted on as pleasantly as ever, the time would have passed very awkwardly away.

Once or twice Gerard spoke to Margaret, but she scarcely lifted up her eyes, and her words were as few as possible in reply. She felt sure that her aunt's interference had extended to him, though she could not guess that her aunt, by way of vindicating her maidenly reserve, had told him that she had declared that she could never prefer him.

Mrs. Maitland and Harriet had scarcely driven from the gates, when Gerard came into the morning-room, and shut the door after him. Margaret was busy with her housekeeping accounts. He stood upon the rug till she seemed to have finished them, and then said, "Margaret, my uncle should not be left alone at his great age. When are you to go to Mrs. Seagrave?"

"In August," said Margaret.

"I am going up to town to stay a few weeks; I will return when you go away, and stay here with my uncle."

"Very well," said Margaret, making a pattern with her pen along the edge of her account-book,

and feeling very uncomfortable. "Shall you take your servant with you?" she presently asked, congratulating herself on having found something to say.

"Yes, of course," said Gerard calmly; "he is not wanted here any more than I am."

He spoke with such perfect temper and composure, that Margaret did not know what to answer; he was not joking, and he was not speaking ironically, but quietly uttering a fixed opinion.

"I am afraid my uncle will be a little disappointed," observed Margaret at length.

"He has been very kind and hospitable," Gerard replied, "and when I told him that I thought of taking myself off, at least for the present, he stipulated that I should come back and spend Christmas with him; and so I will, if you have no objection."

Still the same easy calm. Margaret did not dare to look at him—the pattern now nearly reached the bottom of the page—"If I have no objection?" she presently ventured to reply.

"Certainly," he replied. "When a man intends to be a lady's guest, even during her absence, he can scarcely do less than put in that qualifying clause."

"If you represent yourself as my guest," Margaret replied, "you immediately make me anxious as to whether I have been an agreeable hostess."

"I should not have so represented it, if you had not done so yourself," he replied in as gentle and calm a tone as before.

"I did certainly say in jest one day something about your being my guest," said Margaret; "I was far from intending you to take it in earnest."

"I have said many things to you in jest," answered Gerard, "that I should be sorry to have

you take in earnest. I am sometimes afraid—sure, indeed, that I have taken too much upon myself. However, it is of no use regretting that now; I have other things to regret, things done and things left undone. Good-bye, Margaret."

"What do you mean?" said Margaret, as he approached her with his hand extended; "are you going now—this minute?"

Gerard looked down upon her glowing face, and eyes which were moistened, with softened feeling. "Yes," he said, still preserving his set manner; "you know that the Bishop asked me to spend a day or two at the palace. Well, I shall go on there with my uncle this morning, and from thence by train to town. My servant is to come to-morrow with my portmanteau."

They shook hands. Margaret tried hard to think of something to say, but racked her brain in vain. If their Aunt Maitland had stood beside them in the body, they could not have felt more constrained than now. "Good-bye, Gerard," said Margaret; "I hope you will enjoy yourself in London;" and with these words, which grated on his ears like mockery, they parted.

"All this," thought Margaret, when left to herself—"all this comes of my aunt's horrid interference. She has deprived me of the most congenial friend I ever had, by putting it into his head that I—oh, cruel of her! I won't think of it—and she has made me so miserable by declaring that she thought I had a preference for him (*preference*, indeed! I hate the affected word)—she has put me so utterly to the blush, that I actually feel it a relief to know that Gerard is going. And yet I am very proud of him. What a difference he made in the house! Really I could find in my heart to cry a little, if I did not fear that he would come back and find me doing it, and say to him—

self, ‘Ah, poor thing! what havoc I have made with her heart!’ ”

Thinking of how Gerard might be supposed to look, in saying these words, Margaret laughed; and the laugh was still upon her face, brightening it and softening its usual intellectual expression, when the door did open, and Gerard did come in again. Margaret felt that *he saw* she had been amused and happy during his short absence; and if she had been aware that he would return, and had made an effort to be found with that smile on her lips, she might now have felt confused, but as it was, she was glad. She knew that this little incident must, in the nature of things, tend to disabuse his mind of the fancy that *she* supposed him to entertain, and this gave her a sudden feeling of relief and returning ease.

“Some man has called,” said Gerard, “and my uncle must attend to him before he can start.”

“Now I will say something pleasant,” thought Margaret. “I am not afraid; I will—I will act naturally;” so she walked up to where he was standing on the rug. “It is a very wet day,” she observed; “have you got a railway wrapper with you?”

Gerard said he had.

“Then I hope you will keep yourself warm, Gerard; remember that the damp must be trying to you after the suns of India. I wish you would not travel this very wet weather.”

This resumption of her old manner pleased Gerard, and he smiled in spite of himself.

“And, Gerard,” said Margaret, growing bolder still, “I know that I have once or twice annoyed you by allusions to a subject which perhaps, as I am so much younger than yourself, you never meant me to know, and only hinted at in an unguarded hour. It amused me and interested me,

and perhaps I have not touched upon it with all due delicacy and care. I apologize, but if I am going to offend again, it shall certainly be for the very last time."

Gerard looked attentively at her, but neither stirred nor spoke.

She went to her desk, and returned with a little case in her hand. "Do you remember that snowy day, Gerard, when you and Miss Mostyn and I each took likenesses of ourselves, copying our features from looking-glasses?"

"Yes," said Gerard; "your portrait of yourself was the only one that was tolerable."

"Yes, I do think it was like," said Margaret, laughing; "it was such a plain girl. However, I have finished it, and it assuredly is *not flattered*; flattery being a vice that I specially detest in a portrait. Well, Gerard, I am particularly anxious that this, the forbidden subject, the individual whose existence I apologize for alluding to, should like me, and get a sort of idea of what I am like. So Gerard, if by going to town, you are going to place yourself nearer to the forbidden subject, give her this, will you? Tell her I have got her portrait, and admire it very much; and here is mine, and on the other side my uncle's."

Gerard held out his hand, and Margaret gave him the little case, which was merely a photograph frame from which she had removed the original picture. As he did not speak, she at length looked up to him; his eyes were brimming with merriment, and his lips trembled with the effort to repress a laugh.

But with all his efforts he did not succeed; the sight of her surprise completely upset his gravity, he burst out laughing, and seemed irresistibly impelled to break out again and again with fresh fits of merriment. "Polly," he said at length

with all his old ease and cordiality, "sit down, will you, I want to talk, and I cannot if you stand. There, that will do; now don't look so startled, so sensitive, and so delightfully ashamed. Margaret, you gave me this for—"

"For Henrietta," said Margaret.

"Yes, you did, you young, you very young Margaret, my cousin, and perhaps my friend. (I am not sure about that.) Margaret, I am a great fool, and I am going to prove it. There is no such person as Henrietta, and there never has been."

"Never has been!" repeated Margaret, confused.

"Never has been. She was a myth, an ideal; now don't look at me with that indignant air, as if I had asserted her real existence. I never did."

"You have often talked about her," said Margaret, trying to collect her scattered thoughts.

"I said once that my favourite name was Henrietta," said Gerard, "and soon after *you* said, 'Whom *is she* like?'"

"But if this has really been all nonsense," exclaimed Margaret, "what can have been its motive?"

"Ah, the motives, Margaret; I would rather keep some of the complicated motives to myself;" and then he proceeded to tell her how he had long ago formed to his imagination a model lady who was to possess all the virtues and attractions that he saw or fancied, and have the crowning one of preferring him to all others; and how he had given her a name; but here he stopped, and neither told why he had suffered the self-deception of the girls to go on, nor why he had felt it impossible to tell all when he wished to do so.

Margaret pondered in mute surprise, till suddenly remembering that there was now no use for the portrait, she started up and claimed it.

Gerard at this laughed more than ever. "Why,

what did you mean me to do with it, in case I was *not* going to see Henrietta ?" he exclaimed, holding it out of her reach, for she seemed inclined to seize it.

"I did not think about it; come, Gerard, let us part tolerable friends."

"Exactly what I want to do."

"Well, then, give me myself back again."

"Tell me, then, what you meant me to do with the picture in case I was not going to see Henrietta? You meant it for my own delectation, no doubt; I was to refresh myself with a view of this private picture gallery, this portrait of a plain young lady!"

"I meant to give it to you, whenever you were going to see Henrietta. And as to this ridiculous, entirely ridiculous, superlatively ridiculous, story about having an ideal! O, Gerard, I could not have believed it of you! And *you*, seven-and-twenty, so old, so wise, so fond of lecturing other people! O, Gerard! Now give me the picture; I mean to have it."

"No; but I will make a bargain with you: you shall have all the portraits of my late dear Henrietta, and I will keep this."

"No such thing; give it me."

"It is as you say, not at all a flattered likeness," observed Gerard, still holding it out of her reach. "I think I could have drawn you in fairer colours, Margaret, than you have drawn yourself, and yet have produced a better likeness. There is the carriage coming round again. Good-bye."

"And the picture," said Margaret, "I want it."

"Possession is nine points of the law," he replied, putting it into his waistcoat pocket; "perhaps I shall be back next week, and then I will give it up."

"Next week!"

"I expected to be out longer, but if this picture *must* be returned so soon, I must return to do it."

"But, Gerard, I must and will have it," said Margaret, with gravity and earnestness.

"Do you know, I feel sure that you will not have it," replied Gerard, buttoning his coat, and drawing his plaid round him.

"Very well," said Margaret, with a simplicity of manner that became her exceedingly, "then I shall suppose that there was nothing ridiculous in my having given it you for the myth; and that you only keep it because you are amused at my having been taken in, which was not wonderful, considering my youth and your age, you know, Gerard. So as you are of course a much better judge of what is proper and *convenable* than I am, I shall suppose that you see nothing unusual in what I have done; and I am so sure you would not make me ridiculous, and lead me into a ridiculous predicament, that I will leave it to you to return that thing or not, as you think best. For I am ignorant, and you are not."

"The carriage is at the door, Sir," said a servant, entering.

"Very well, I will come," said Gerard; and he reluctantly took the little case from his pocket. "This is not the first time you have worsted me by saying unanswerable things," he remarked. "There is the likeness. I deserve to lose by a stratagem, what I obtained dishonestly."

Margaret took her picture. Gerard again shook hands with her and left her: this time she did not laugh, nor feel inclined to cry, but sat a long time silent, with her account-book lying open, and the portrait on her knee. She then said aloud, "This is the most extraordinary thing I ever knew. Why, Gerard is the most romantic person in the world! and this Henrietta, who seemed so much

a reality, does he really mean to tell me that he *invented* her? But how odd he was about keeping my picture! If vanity was my besetting sin, I could find food for it in that. Very well, Gerard, you have no Henrietta, have you? Then let me see you succeed, if you can, in calling me 'my dear' again. I will not be called a child; I am a woman, and he shall treat me as one."

"If you please, ma'am," said nurse, coming in, "the man is come about the new stair carpets."

"Tell him to wait," said Margaret, majestically; and her nurse retiring, she shut up her desk, closed her books, put away her portrait, and walked into the housekeeper's room with a decidedly more stately step than usual.





CHAPTER XI.

MARGARET'S MISSION.

"I stand by the river where both of us stood,
And there is but one figure cast back in the flood ;
And the path leading to it we both used to pass,
Has the step of but one to take dew from the grass."

E. B. BROWNING.

HE Archdeacon was to stay away from home three days ; and Margaret spent much of this time in the sound of hammers and the smell of new carpets, for she knew that all noise, change, and cleaning, were distasteful to him. But when he returned, and she ran into the hall to meet him, she was so proud of the finished work, that she could not help leading him triumphantly into his study, and thence into the dining-room.

"Dear, dear, how grand!" exclaimed the indulgent old man. "I hardly know the old house again!"

"Is it not improved, uncle? I thought you would say so; and that old Turkey carpet had hardly a morsel of nap left on it; it really was not fit to be seen."

The Archdeacon observed with a prefatory hem, "But, my dear, at my great age—I don't know, I'm sure, whether it would not have been better to have made the old carpets last out my time."

"But, uncle, your study carpet was full of holes."

"Full of holes, my dear, was it?"

"Yes, uncle; don't you remember that great hole by the window, that I laid a mat upon, lest you should catch your foot in it?"

"Well," said her uncle, slowly, "that certainly makes a difference; but I ought not to be increasing my expenditure at my time of life; I ought to have done with worldly decorations."

"But, uncle, you told me how much you wished me to spend each quarter, and I have not exceeded one shilling. If you like me to spend less money, say so. You can easily live on less, in all the comfort you have been used to; but I do not say that you can have new carpets."

"Live on less, Pussy! Well, I should be well pleased to do so; and I am sure you are quite a princess among housekeepers."

"Thank you, uncle; then you do not object to the new carpets?"

"Oh, no, no, child; I suppose they were necessary; Green has been telling me so for years."

But in spite of that, the Archdeacon often looked disconcerted. When he walked into his well-ordered dining-room, and sometimes when the dinner was more ample than usual, he would say, "I could be well content, my child, with simpler fare." So she gradually reduced the table to suit his wish; and by the time that Gerard had been away a fortnight, he had several times said, "This is as it should be;" or, "This state of things is more becoming a Christian minister."

Gerard had written to announce his intended return; and Margaret had acknowledged to herself that she should be particularly pleased to see him: when observing that her uncle was intent on his own letters, she asked him some questions

about them, and he handed one over to her. "From Mrs. Seagrave!" exclaimed Margaret; and reading it hastily, she found that her still dear and kind friend was ill, and longed for a little of her society. She did not like to wait another fortnight for it, as had been proposed, but wanted her to come at once; still, if the Archdeacon could not spare her at present, she must wait, and she hoped he would not think her impatient.

"You may go to-morrow, my dear, if you like," said her uncle; "for as Gerard is coming, I shall not be left alone."

Margaret did not like: she would rather the original time had been retained.

"Or if you cannot be ready by to-morrow," proceeded her uncle, "start the next morning."

"I can easily be ready to-morrow, uncle," answered Margaret.

"So be it then; and remember you have my leave to stay six weeks."

A little time previously to this, Margaret's heart would have danced for joy at the prospect of being with her dear Mrs. Seagrave, and helping her as she fully intended to do; now she felt a little, a very little, secret disinclination to leave home; not that she loved Mrs. Seagrave less, but that Gerard's last conversation with her had piqued her curiosity, and interested her so much, that she felt really anxious to see him again. However, at last she said, "Thank you, uncle;" and the matter being now fully decided, she had plenty to do. She resolved to leave her nurse at home, and let her be a temporary housekeeper; for the old person who had so long mismanaged the house, was suffering from a severe fit of rheumatism, and was, as Margaret thought, *happily* unfit to preside.

Nurse was pleased and proud. "She could keep

accounts with the best of them. *She* would see that master had everything comfortable."

"But my uncle is not to be teased with stories of discontent in the household, or an account of any fault," exclaimed Margaret.

"Leave me alone for that, ma'am," replied nurse, looking wise. "I know them, and *they know me*."

This speech implied a good deal; the manner of it implied more. Margaret was not so certain of her nurse's tact as of her uprightness and sagacity. But she was obliged to leave her with plenary powers, unless she intended matters to relapse into their old disgraceful state of waste and disorder. So she gave her the book and the keys, with many general directions to be just and kind in the household; and having taken leave of her uncle, set off on her journey, with a gouty old coachman as conductor of the little green carriage, and the awkward daughter of a neighbouring farmer inside, who was travelling in the same direction, and whom the Archdeacon wished to accommodate with a lift, partly from a general feeling of benevolence towards the world, partly from a particular liking for this girl, because, as he told Margaret, she was his best "missionary collector."

Margaret approached Mrs. Seagrave's house, and Gerard approached her home; whether either of them thought of the other at this juncture is no business of ours; but that they did not know their uncle was purposely keeping them asunder, and had urged on Margaret's journey with this intent, is as certain as the other fact, that it was all owing to their Aunt Maitland, who had put all manner of things into his head, besides impressing him with a notion of her own sagacity, by jumping at his own conclusions which had slumbered lately for want of aliment.

Perhaps it was a pity that she had interfered.

Gerard arrived in excellent spirits ; and having stood full a quarter of an hour on the rug, suddenly said, "And how is Margaret?" (Never thought of her till this moment, thinks upwards of eighty, shaking his head.)

"How is Margaret, my dear boy? Why, she is very well. Her old friend Mrs. Seagrave wrote to say—(coughs, and returns upon his words,) her old friend Mrs. Seagrave wrote to say—" (coughs again.)

Gerard makes a gesture of irrepressible impatience, and asks, "Is she in the garden?"

"No, my dear boy; I was just going to say that her old friend Mrs. Seagrave wrote to say she wished her to come to her earlier; so she set off this morning with Mary Cooper; you remember Mary Cooper, Gerard?" Under thirty neither knows nor cares anything about Mary Cooper. Upwards of eighty goes on, "There could not be a more convenient time, as you are going to be at home for the next few weeks, and therefore she knows I shall be taken care of; for I am sure I do not know which is the most kind and attentive. I have a great deal to be thankful for."

Under thirty does not say a single word; but when upwards of eighty has fallen into a little afternoon doze, he walks into the morning room, and looks about him with an air of regretful interest. A good many of Margaret's little possessions are lying about; Gerard takes up one after the other, and restlessly puts them down again. Finally he goes up to her studio, and sulks there for some time, till hearing the dressing-bell, he recovers his temper, resolves to make the best of it, and is so entertaining, that he keeps his host awake the whole evening.

Margaret's regret was not very defined. She certainly would rather not have left home just

then; but she felt that the consciousness, so strangely acquired, of there being in sober truth no Henrietta, must make a difference in the ease and freedom with which she had hitherto talked to Gerard. She knew that when he came she should feel shy, and therefore she had not travelled many miles with the farmer's daughter, before she was very well satisfied that things should be as they were; and when she reached her destination, there was something so very delightful to her in the warm reception that awaited her, and the pleasure that her late preceptress evidently expected to receive from her visit, that she soon forgot her regret, and even allowed her housekeeping cares, and wonders as to how nurse would manage, to slip out of her mind.

It was holiday time, and the pupils who had no English homes, were at the sea-side with the German teacher. Mrs. Seagrave received her in the little pink drawing-room; she was out of health; she was glad of all Margaret's little attentions; and Margaret delighted in finding herself useful and necessary. They went out together in the pony-chaise, and Margaret drove; they came in, and she made the tea; she wrote letters for her friend, and played to her in the dusk; she gradually took upon herself to conduct the affairs of the household, and Mrs. Seagrave was delighted to have it so.

"Ah, Margaret," she sometimes said, "what shall I do when the holidays are over, and you are gone?" Margaret never made any answer to such remarks, but had formed a secret project, which she ardently hoped she should be suffered to carry out. Her uncle had given her full leave to stay for six weeks, and when at the end of a fortnight Mrs. Seagrave, still languid and unfit for exertion, was lying on her couch, expecting the return of

her pupils, Margaret suddenly said, "I have a favour to ask of you."

"Ask it then," was the ready reply: "I wish I knew of anything worth granting."

"I have set my heart upon this, and you are so kind, that I know you will not refuse. I want you to install me for a month, only for a month, in your position; give me authority, and see whether I cannot teach the girls what you used to teach us, and manage them."

"What, do you want a little power, Margaret?" said Mrs. Seagrave, half laughing, and looking as if she could hardly think Margaret's proposition had been made in earnest.

"I want to be the head teacher, the principal governess, or whatever else you will call me, of this school. I do want that particular thing in good earnest, and nothing else."

"And am I to do nothing? My dear child, your uncle would not like you to be confined to the school-room for hours every day while you stay with me."

"Yes, he would; I have written and asked him."

"Margaret, do you expect me to get worse, to decline? and are you undertaking this onerous task in order to give me quiet and rest?"

"I do not expect you to decline, *if* you have quiet and rest, and I long to procure it for you; but that is not my sole motive; I wish to try my own powers, they are rusting for want of use."

Margaret carried the day; the pupils, as they were brought into the little pink drawing-room, were each in turn informed that Miss Grant was for the present Mrs. Seagrave's assistant, and that Mrs. Seagrave desired she might be treated with all deference.

How wildly Margaret's heart beat the next

morning when she found herself seated in the school-room, in the place of honour, Mrs. Seagrave's own chair! But she had first to try her powers with the youngest girls, who were about to repeat a lesson in geography, and were far too much afraid of the new strange teacher to notice her nervousness. It was the elder girls (two of whom had been her own schoolfellows) whom she chiefly dreaded, for she half feared they might laugh when they came to her for their lesson in arithmetic. But, O happy circumstance! their table was so arranged that they did not face her; and she had recovered her self-possession, when at length they defiled before her, three of them as tall as herself, and two of the same age, with furtive smiles upon their lips.

"Courage," thought Margaret; "if I fail, the loss of this month of rest may cost Mrs. Seagrave her life."

She happened to drop something; one of her pupils started forward and presented it with deference. Margaret felt abashed to the last degree. It was a new pupil, however; and as she met her eyes, it was a pleasure to know that there was no familiarity in them.

The pupils arranged themselves round the table; now Margaret knew she must speak, and in spite of her exceeding desire to be calm and decided in manner, her voice trembled, and she stammered from shyness and confusion of mind. Primrose White was sitting before her with an easy smile; the sight of that smile nerved Margaret, and she had presence of mind to set all the girls sums sufficiently difficult at least to banish merriment, and make some look dismayed, and others sullen.

They sat a few minutes; some were evidently too proud to confess their inability to work them, others were melancholy under the notion that they

had a gloomy future to look forward to, if all their sums were to be like these.

Margaret waited patiently; at length perceiving that Primrose White really could not proceed any further, and was becoming flushed and puzzled, she said calmly and politely, "I am ready for your sum, Miss White."

"I have not finished it," exclaimed Primrose, swelling with mortification; "it is too difficult."

She was so much disconcerted, that Margaret began to feel at her ease. She had the courage to reply calmly, "Did you speak to me?"

Whereupon Primrose, almost to her own surprise, replied more civilly, "I said that I had not finished it, Miss Grant; it is so difficult."

Margaret took the slate, and said, "I am surprised to hear you say so; I should have found it easy when I was half your age." Perhaps it was the first time in her life that she had uttered a boast; and she did it then with a certain object, which was attained, for—

Primrose, thrown off her guard, answered bluntly, "It cannot be expected that I should understand arithmetic as well as you do."

"Certainly not," answered Margaret; "if that were the case, I should not be here to teach and you to learn. I shall teach you as simply and clearly as I can, and I expect that you learn with docility."

Primrose did not know what good service she had done to her new preceptress by becoming uncivil and out of temper. Margaret was at length at her ease; and while she explained the first rules of arithmetic to her class, and patiently proved to them that they had not thoroughly and satisfactorily understood them hitherto, Primrose gradually recovered from her fit of sullenness, became first interested, and then really anxious to

understand, and at last gave some very intelligent answers to the questions put to her.

The time passed quickly, both to her and her pupils; so much so, that when Mrs. Seagrave entered at twelve o'clock to dismiss the pupils, she was agreeably surprised.

The first week in the schoolroom was a pleasant week to Margaret. Mrs. Seagrave evidently enjoyed the rest and quiet it enabled her to take. And the pupils were assuredly improving under her care; even the most dull and stupid among them caught a little of her enthusiasm; and what was quite as important, she began to find that she was by no means deficient in the art of governing, nor in the art of making herself beloved. The second week passed; Margaret began to feel and to acknowledge to herself that Mrs. Seagrave was not really improving now; she was often faint, sometimes drowsy, and she did not take the same interest in passing events that Margaret had been accustomed to observe in her.

The third week came, and with it a letter from Blanch. Her wedding day was fixed, earlier than had been intended; it was to be in ten days, in order that she and Mr. Stewart might sail by the next overland mail packet. Margaret was puzzled; here was her friend on the one hand, and on the other her preceptress and her "mission," as she had sometimes allowed herself to call these attempts at teaching. No, she could not permit herself to leave Mrs. Seagrave now that she so much needed her; she must remain, and forego the pleasure of seeing Blanch married.

So she wrote a long and affectionate letter to Blanch, telling her how impossible it was for her to fulfil her intention, and be her bridesmaid; and begging her to ask one of her sisters to write and give her a long and very particular account of

everything that happened. But if Margaret had known a little more about weddings, she would scarcely have expected that there would be time and opportunity to write long letters ; in fact, the inmates of the parsonage were all in a state of excitement, so busy, that sometimes they almost forgot that they had to part with Blanch ; and then again so agitated at the thought of parting with her, that they almost forgot how busy they were, or must be if they hoped to have everything ready in time.

In fact there was much to make the wedding a melancholy one—removing three, instead of only one, from home, and to another side of the world, with little prospect that the mother would ever see them again.

The quiet composed character of Blanch's mind carried her through the preparations, and seemed to hold up her sisters. When once convinced, by Mr. Mowbray's assurances, and by the evident relief to her father, that she was really acting for the good of the family, she bore up against unnerving regrets and fancies that her affection for them might be doubted when she went away to prosperity, and left them to struggle on. It was only little unexpected things that broke down her composure, such as little Anne rushing into the room from her lessons with Carrie, crying, "O, sister, when you get that long way off, shall you be our 'tipodes ?'" Yet even then Blanch must gulp down her tears. Her mother must not be agitated ; and it was every moment plain that the least weakness on the elder sister's part, would be the sign for floods of disabling tears from Carrie and Emma. Poor Margaret ! there was little room for the thought of her ; and she would not have been flattered, had she known how much

more freely Carrie breathed on learning that she was not to have "that Miss Grant" upon her hands.

It was the quietest of weddings—not a guest present but Mr. Mowbray, who joined the hands of the young pair; and Blanch went through the whole with resolute stillness, her face as white as her dress, but without a tear. That was a luxury not to be indulged in through that strange unreal seeming morning.

And then?

Blanch rolling away in her fly had a comforter; but who was to comfort those left behind?

O, the desolateness of that afternoon! with one parting over, and another to come; for Arthur and Charles were to join the bridal pair on board ship the next evening.

They were with their parents in Mrs. Mostyn's room, and the younger girls were wistfully watching for their coming out, so as to enjoy every possible moment with them. Carrie had packed and directed every box and bag; and wearied out, body and mind, she wandered out into the air for refreshment; and anxious to be entirely alone, and calm her throbbing temples, and tune her mind by stillness, she strolled further and further from the voices in the garden, and at last found herself on the bank of a little clear stream, where she had often walked with Blanch, and watched her brothers fishing.

"Never more! never more!" she thought; her tired limbs seemed to give way, and she sat down under a young alder tree, giving free course to the burst of tears and sobs that had been so long repressed.

Poor child! it was a long and violent weeping; and in her sense of separation and desolateness, she took no note of time, till she was startled by a

strange hoarse voice, saying, "Poor Carrie!" Again, just over head, with an odd sound of complacency in the cracked voice, "Poor Carrie! poor Carrie!"

She jumped up, frightened as if some one were cruelly laughing at her grief, but no one could she see: only "A good voyage, ma'am," came down from overhead. Really it was like some fairy tale of mocking elves; and Carrie in a moment's alarm would have run away, and then thought it all an imagination, if another "Poor Carrie" had not made her look up; when, helping itself along by hooked beak and leather-cased claw, she beheld on the tree beside her, a grey powdered parrot, with a scarlet tail, observing, even while using his mouth as a walking-stick, "Tak' me wi' you!"

"Mr. Macdonald," exclaimed Carrie; though till that moment she had supposed him three hundred miles off; and sure enough the answer was,

"It was na' me, Miss Carrie; it was the puir bird. I thought it might whiles comfort Miss Blanch to hear him name the name she loves so weel; and so I brought the creature doon with me this last day, that your brothers might take it to her on board ship, and beg her to accept it from me."

"It was very kind of you," said Carrie, in a tremulous voice, as she raised her swollen eyelids to him, and two large tears flowed down her pale cheeks.

This was too much for Morgan Arthur's kind heart. Her look of utter weariness and sorrow, her heavy eyelids, her worn-out voice, quite overcame him, and instead of speaking, he sat down at her feet and fairly burst into tears, and sobbed aloud.

Carrie turned almost faint with surprise and perplexity; and he, poor fellow! worn out by the morning's emotion and fatigue, for he had come

up by the night train, walked from the station, and hovered round the church and parsonage ever since four o'clock in the morning, only made matters worse by his desperate struggles to check the sobs of which he was ashamed.

"What shall I do? What can I do?" thought Carrie; but nothing came to her aid but the parrot, which shuffled up to him along the grass, observing "Tak' me wi' ye" so comically, that both were in danger of becoming hysterical.

There was a silence broken only by Morgan Arthur's convulsive sobs. He had thrown himself on the grass, and pressed one hand on his head. Carrie was sure that he must be ill, and rushing to the water, dipped in her handkerchief, and softly touching his hand, said, "Press this to your forehead, Mr. Macdonald; I am sure it will do you good. We must all try to comfort each other to-day."

All on a sudden she found her hand tightly squeezed in both his; and the parrot suddenly exclaimed, "Poor Carrie! Tak' me wi' you!"

"The birdie has said it!" exclaimed Morgan Arthur. "Take me with you, Carrie. Ye've tried to comfort me as no woman has ever done before. Could not you take comfort your own self in the north country lad that stands before you, uncouth as he knows himself to be? Oh, Carrie! through all this weary time, and this long morning, I found it was you that I thought of, 'twas you that I watched! 'Twas your name of them all that the bird learned of me, though I meant she should call them all. And I give you the word of an honest man, the tears would not have mastered me if I had not seen your sorrowful face. I said to myself, 'Comfort her, Morgan Arthur;' and then when I made a fool of myself instead, and you spoke the words of comfort to me, and the bird

spoke up, it came on me like a light. ‘Tell her like a man, you’ll love and cherish her truly all the days of your life, if she will but give you that little hand!’”

And once more the parrot added, “Take me wi’ you!” but there was no absurdity in the heart-glow of earnest love that illumined the homely face, and inspired the rugged tongue.

What did Carrie do? She reasoned not. All she knew was that her desolateness had been over from the moment she had been aware of the vicinity of him who had shared and lightened her cares for the last twelve months. She put her hand into his, and had found her comforter.

They were on their way back to the parsonage, when a mournful voice cried from the alder, “Poor Polly! take me with you.”

And as Mr. Mostyn stood with the younger children on the lawn, he saw *two* long shadows coming over the grass, and Carrie on one side of the tall pupil, on whose other fist sat like a hawk, only in a powdered suit, the grey parrot.

“Oh!” cried little Anne, “why do they walk so like Blanch and Mr. Stewart?”

“May I have her, Sir?” said Morgan Arthur, walking straight up to him.

* * * * *

“And so,” said Arthur Mostyn, when he joined Blanch on the P. and O. Steamer, “there is to be another wedding in the family, and *this* is the bird that made the offer!”

* * * * *

“To-morrow I shall hear all about it,” thought Margaret; but the morrow brought no letter, and the next day only brought a thin little envelope, addressed in a scratchy girlish hand.

Dear Blanch had left them very well in health, and with great self-control. All had gone off well;

and dear mamma was not much the worse for the bustle and excitement. Then came an apology for not having written sooner; but it was only yesterday evening that the dear brothers had left home, and that morning the writer (Emma) had been sending letters to eight other friends, and her hand ached so much that she feared her note would be hardly legible. Margaret folded it up, and then noticed the postscript.

"Dearest Caroline is engaged to dear Morgan Arthur Macdonald. Darling Blanch sends you her love. She sails to-morrow."

"And that is the end of it," thought Margaret, as she turned away with an aching heart. "The jest is true enough as to the worthlessness of school-girl friendships. What have I ever been to Blanch?"

But Margaret had no time for these regrets. Mrs. Seagrave had ceased to leave her bed, and she was sitting by her, and trying to soothe her agitated spirits, when a physician who had been called in the day previously arrived, and after paying his visit to the patient, called Margaret out of the room, and, to her great alarm, told her that he feared the low fever under which Mrs. Seagrave had been labouring for some time would turn to typhus, and that all the pupils ought immediately to be removed from the house.

"I do not consider that the fever is infectious at present," he continued, seeing Margaret's look of excessive dismay: "but as a measure of precaution, the young people should be at once sent home."

"But the parents of most of them are in India, and they have no homes to go to," exclaimed Margaret; "besides, if I take them away, who is to nurse Mrs. Seagrave?"

The physician shrugged his shoulders. "That I must leave with you, Miss Grant. I was led to suppose that you were the lady in authority, and excuse my saying that any professional nurse is a more suitable person than yourself to nurse Mrs. Seagrave through such an illness as I believe is impending; indeed, even if you stay, I must request that a proper person be placed by her to assist her own confidential servant."

"That alters the case," said Margaret. "If I cannot nurse Mrs. Seagrave, my next wish would be to keep her pupils from being dispersed."

"Surely, surely," said the matter-of-fact physician; "Mrs. Seagrave's pupils are her living, and as she has no power now to give an opinion as to what should be done, it is well that you are here to take it on yourself, Miss Grant, or this establishment might have to be dissolved." So saying, and coolly drawing on his gloves, the physician went his way, and Margaret was left to her meditations.

He had just reached the garden gate, and was beckoning to his man to lead up his horse, when a hand upon his arm made him turn. Margaret had been running after him, and being by this time quite out of breath, had thus arrested his attention.

"I have decided what to do," said Margaret.

"Indeed, Miss Grant!" he replied, without the least appearance of interest or sympathy such as one might have supposed her responsible position, her youth, and the painful nature of the circumstances, would have called forth.

"I wish to send a message to my uncle by electric telegraph," she proceeded, "and as I heard you say you should pass the railway station, may I trouble you to take it?"

"I will do so," he replied calmly. "Is it written down?"

"No; I had no time to write it."

"No consequence, Miss Grant; I will take it down on my tablets."

This Margaret felt to be quite a generous and noble thing for him to do, and so he evidently felt himself. He took out his tablets, and Margaret dictated her message, which he wrote down without any comment or the least change of countenance.

"Margaret Grant to Archdeacon Wilton.

"Mrs. Seagrave's illness threatens to become typhus fever. The pupils are ordered out of the house: nine of them have no homes. What am I to do with them? and what shall I do myself? There is no one else to take charge of them."

The physician, ceasing to write, counted the words, and mentioned what the message would cost. Margaret took out her purse, and paid for it; and, with a polite bow, he went his way, and Margaret returned to the house.

She felt almost certain what her uncle's answer would be; and aware that, whatever it might be, nine of her pupils must accompany her to some place sufficiently distant to leave no fear of infection, she summoned the German teacher, and telling her what the physician had said, inquired whether she would remain in the house and superintend Mrs. Seagrave's household, or whether she would follow the pupils. The Fraulein chose to remain, of which Margaret was glad on the whole, as she knew that Mrs. Seagrave had the fullest confidence in her, and as she was a most proper person to be in charge of the poor patient's comfort, as well as of her worldly interests; but on the other hand, this decision left the whole responsibility of the pupils on Margaret's own hands. None of the relations of those who happened to

have friends in England resided at more than twenty miles distant, and therefore to them word was sent at once, that they must remove their children; and Margaret superintended the packing of their clothes with great activity. But the nine who were without homes! what should she do to have them ready in time to go away on that day? At first, that is, for two hours after she returned to the house, she could not think of anything but the pupils whom she was to part from: but their interests being disposed of, it was absolutely necessary to think of those whom she was to take with her. And after that there was dinner to be attended to. The pupils, though aware that they were to go away almost immediately, and though their minds were in all the excitement and confusion into which such a piece of news might be supposed to throw a company of girls, were not able to give Margaret an extra half-hour by going without their dinner, and it was scarcely over before carriages arrived to take away some of those who were not to be her own peculiar charge. But Margaret was obliged to leave the management of this matter to the German teacher, and to take her own pupils, together with two intelligent housemaids, into the garden, where, seated on the grass under the shade of a tree, she could explain to them her wishes. This she had scarcely begun to do, (for the girls were nervous, and had to be comforted and reassured,) when the answer to her telegraphic message arrived. It was as follows:—

“Mr. Grant to Miss Grant.

“My uncle commissions me to answer your message. He desires that you do not enter the sick-room again, nor remain in the house more than two hours. You are to return here, bringing your nine pupils with you: if you come by the

next express train, you will reach us by midnight. Rooms will be ready for you. I shall meet you with carriages at the station. Pray take care of yourself."

It was now nearly two o'clock, and Margaret knew that the express train left the nearest station at which it stopped, shortly after five; but this station was six miles from Mrs. Seagrave's house, and though she had fully expected to be ordered home, she had not ventured to bespeak vehicles before receiving the message. She now sent one of the housemaids to order three post-chaises; and with the other, and with her nine pupils, she stole up a back staircase, and reached the sleeping apartments as quietly as possible.

It was a great blow to her to receive such direct orders not to enter Mrs. Seagrave's room again; but she felt that she must not disobey, though it cost her many tears to think of leaving the house, and very possibly never seeing this dear friend again. Yet as she stood giving directions respecting the packing of clothes and books, she considered that the truest kindness she could bestow on her was to run as little risk as possible of becoming unfit for the great charge she had undertaken; and such unceasing effort was needful in order that everything might be ready, that she could not dwell on the parting, but was obliged to give continual attention to the work before her.

When once the girls had recovered from their nervous agitation, and had found that they could be useful to Margaret, it was surprising with what intelligence, quietness, and activity, they collected their clothes and books; and as from time to time the German teacher came in to tell Margaret how Mrs. Seagrave seemed to be, and never gave a very discouraging account, the whole body of packers,

with Margaret at their head, were kept in tolerable spirits, and appeared likely to be ready when the chaises arrived. Boxes were carried down stairs, more boxes were filled, books were found, music selected, evening dresses and shawls were carried down by the younger girls, and empty trunks stood on the dining-room floor ready to receive more and more articles according to the time that might be left for packing after the most essential things had been attended to. The hall and dining-room looked like a fair, so completely were they strewed and cumbered with knick-knacks—with ribbons, laces, pretty bonnets, jewellery, work-baskets, fancy-work, slippers, and every description of article that girls delight in.

At length four o'clock struck, and Margaret sent up a bevy of girls to fetch down all the bonnets, mantles, &c., which had been laid out ready for the journey, while the remainder accompanied her into the pantry to cut a quantity of bread and butter to be eaten on the way, for the stoppages during the night would, she knew, be very short, and she did not think she could venture to let her charge leave the carriages till Gerard should meet them.

To take so long a journey, not only without escort, but with so many young girls under her charge, appeared a very formidable thing when she had time to think of it, which was not often: and she was aware that even if time would have permitted that her nurse could have been sent part of the way to meet her, there would then have been no one to be depended on at home to see all prepared for the reception of so large a company.

The thoughtful German teacher had caused tea to be prepared, though she and the servants had a great deal on their hands in waiting on the patient, attending to the wishes of the nurse, who had ar-

rived, and sending away or receiving the parents and friends who continued to alight in quest of their children.

Margaret was glad of some tea. She sat in the hall, with her cup in her hand, still directing, still assisting to pack more and more boxes; but great was her anxiety when at half-past four the chaises had not arrived. Then, while ready and waiting, with nothing to do, conscious of the extreme inconvenience that must ensue if she were late for the express train, and observant of every sound on the gravel walk, and every footfall in the house, she began to feel the full weight of the heavy task she had taken on herself; and she could not but perceive how exceedingly anxious her German friend was to see her off with her charge, for with all the care that could be taken, it was impossible that the house could be really quiet while she remained.

Not till it wanted only twenty-five minutes to five did the chaises make their appearance, and but for the confidence of the drivers that the railway clock was slower than Mrs. Seagrave's clocks and watches—but for their certainty that they could reach the station in time, and their speed and skill in seizing and disposing of the boxes and other luggage, she would not have started. As it was, the pain of this hasty parting with the house of her dear friend was greatly increased by the confusion and hurry of the exit, and the anxiety which every delay on the road caused her. As might have been expected, they reached the station fully a quarter of an hour too late; and now, as turning back was out of the question, she had to make inquiries as to the next train. "The next train, ma'am?" said the railway official. "It stops two hours on the road, and is not a very desirable train." "What time does it reach



Thorley?" she asked. "Thorley Station, ma'am? Let me see; it reaches Thorley Station at half-past four a.m."

Half-past four a.m.! What an hour! but to travel all night would be surely better than taking her charge to an hotel, alone and unattended. Margaret decided to go by this train; but the long line of young ladies standing by her seemed to remind the clerk of something that he had forgotten, and just as Margaret, drawing out her purse, discovered to her dismay that she had not half enough money in her possession to take her charge home, he said, "If she were Miss Grant, would she oblige him by accompanying him to the telegraph office, for a message was awaiting her there."

Margaret, greatly relieved, did as desired, and to her delight found that Gerard had anticipated her difficulty. The message ran thus:—

"I had but just reached home when I remembered that you would probably want money. I accordingly rode over again, and deposited twenty pounds with the station master. Therefore, they will let you have tickets."

Margaret was encouraged by this message, for though she had not perceived the want of money till the instant arrived for using it, the momentary sense of utter forlornness and unfitness for what she had undertaken, had deprived her of her self-possession, and made her feel completely unfit for her work. Now, though at a distance, there was someone who could help her and think for her, and that was a relief to her anxious mind.

She established her charge and herself all in one carriage, and during the long tedious hours from six o'clock till midnight they were all tired

and glad of rest; but at the place where they had to wait two hours and change the carriages, she greatly felt the want of help and escort—the quantity of luggage, the number of pupils, the darkness, the noise, the hurry, were almost too much for her; and when at last she found herself and her charge, with their possessions, in the waiting-room, she felt very much inclined to sit down and cry, for she had slept but little for several nights past, and now she began to feel how much she wanted rest.

But nothing of the kind could be permitted for a moment; if she gave way to low spirits, she thought her tired pupils would one and all follow her example; so she rallied her sinking courage, and began to dispose them on chairs and sofas, giving them such refreshments as the little junction station afforded, and trying to make them comfortable.

The younger ones were sound asleep, and the elder were chilly and wearied, when at length the welcome whistle of the train was heard; and Margaret, coming out with her tribe, discovered to her dismay that one first-class carriage would not accommodate them all; but she was resolved not to be parted from them, and finding that with a little crowding they could all sit in a second-class carriage, she put them in; and it was well that the railway officials looked after the luggage, for she had no time to attend to it. Very peevish and very cross were most of her pupils during the next two hours; they were too closely seated to admit of much change of attitude, yet some dozed, and those who did not were generally not disposed for much conversation. As the day dawned, and Margaret looked on their wan weary faces, and listened to their pettish remarks, she felt as if she must have done them some great unkindness in

running away with them so suddenly, and depriving them of their food and sleep; yet she could not, on reflection, think that it would have been right to take them to an hotel, nor to let them remain for the night exposed to infection in Mrs. Seagrave's house. She did not feel inclined to sleep, but watched the gradual yellow of sunrise filling in the outlines and gilding the clefts of the deep purple hills, now visible, of her native country; the return of colour to the landscape, and distinctness to the shadows, revived her mind, and when the first sunbeam shone on the roof of the carriage, and its reflected glow fell on the sleeping faces about her—when the lamps which they continually passed in their progress began to grow pale in the growing brightness, and the birds began to chirp and flutter, she was so much occupied in noticing and admiring, that she forgot her weariness, and began to count up and reflect upon the very few occasions in her life when she had seen a summer sunrise.

At length the familiar fields of home, the little river, and lastly the outline of the house, passed in review before her; they had to overshoot the mark by four miles, as is often the case in country stations, but she looked at her home closely enough to see how completely it was shut up, and how still and sleepy the environs looked in that early sunshine. One thing, however, struck her as unusual; her great dog, her beloved Nero, was sitting on the terrace; she was sure it was Nero; that proved that Gerard was up, and was probably then preparing to meet her.

The station at last. Margaret woke her pupils, and one by one they sat upright, with surprised and sleepy eyes, dishevelled hair, and crumpled dresses. The train stopped, a gentleman stepped forward, and the pupils one and all appeared an-

noyed, each seeing in her companion's face and apparel what a figure she herself must present. Margaret was the only person who was pleased to see him, and who was oblivious of her dim eyes and rumpled folds.

Gerard handed every pupil out; then he took from Margaret's hand all the various baskets and bags that the girls had brought with them; then he took *her* out, and looked at her in a way that said a great deal. He was evidently both amused and touched; there was something so utterly forlorn in her appearance, so exceedingly weary, so childlike in the joy which she evidently felt at being at home and free from some of her responsibilities, that these things contrasted curiously with the brave act of bringing all this tribe with her such a long distance, and fully intending to govern them and teach them, at least for some time to come.

Margaret felt in his glance the repetition of his oft-repeated assertion, that there was a good deal of the child about her yet; and when he had put all her pupils excepting the youngest into two chaises, and she stood beside him waiting to enter the third, which was being loaded with its share of luggage, she turned towards him and said, "After all, Gerard, I have only done as I was bidden."

He answered, "And what could you have done better, my very dear Margaret?"

The words struck her more than they would have done if used some time previously, but the manner had so much of that approving tenderness that one uses when wishing to encourage and reward a beloved child, that she was not confused by them, though they made her silent. He put her and her pupil into the chaise, and saying that he should ride himself for the sake of the morning air, and that he had been up all night waiting for

them, he shut them in, and they were soon at Thorley.

It was nearly five o'clock when, having partaken of some coffee, they all went softly up stairs to their rooms, preceded by nurse, went to bed, and one and all fell sound asleep in the broad sunshine.

It was about nine o'clock when the Archdeacon came down stairs that morning, and having seen his nephew, and heard of the safety of his niece and all his new guests, said to Gerard, "This is a very extraordinary state of things, my boy."

"I have just arrived at the same conclusion, sir," replied Gerard.

"Here I sit," proceeded the aged gentleman, making movements with his hands as if appealing to the furniture, "I sit reading my letters as usual, when I get a telegraphic message about my niece, and nine other girls—nine of them! You come in: 'What shall I do, my dear Gerard?' I say. 'Do?' you answer, 'why, get Margaret out of that infectious house instantly.' Exactly what I wish. We send for them—the whole ten of them—here they are, before I have time to think about it; and here they will remain for weeks perhaps, with no entertainers but an old bachelor and a young one."

"And a young one! my dear uncle," exclaimed Gerard; "pray do not add that. I am not ambitious of the honour of entertaining them; besides, I can scarcely doubt that the parents of some of them would be by no means ambitious that I should! Young men are not generally supposed to be welcome inmates of a ladies' school."

The Archdeacon appeared to be struck with the justice of this remark.

"I think that the sooner I take myself off the better," said Gerard. "I learnt from old nurse

that two of these girls are heiresses, and will inherit an enormous fortune from some old Nabob; they look as if they had a little of the Asiatic about them; at least I observed two dark slender girls with a slightly hissing mode of speaking, who must, I think, be the two in question. Then there are three who appear to be quite as old as Margaret; White, I think, is their name."

"Ah," said the Archdeacon, interrupting him, "and no doubt their parents do not want them to be introduced into society excepting under their own auspices. Yes, yes, I see—I shall not be able so much as to have a curate to dinner while they remain!"

"If you decide to have them dine with you," Gerard ventured to remark, "of course you cannot; but most school girls dine with their governess." Gerard had no sooner said this than he remembered that this arrangement, if made, would banish Margaret from the family table.

"To be sure—to be sure," replied the Archdeacon. "I forgot that, my boy, my memory fails me. I cannot do without you, so we will dine apart from these young ladies. I wish to do my duty by them, and I desire that Margaret should do hers. I was urgent that she should go and see her friend Mrs. Seagrave, and I must take the consequences of her visit. I am pleased with her for doing her duty, and I must endure the trouble it causes me."

Gerard said no more, though he felt almost jealous for Margaret's sake, to find how easily her uncle was reconciled to the want of her society if he could have his.

About twelve o'clock Margaret and her pupils came down to breakfast, and after that she announced that she should grant them a half holiday that they might arrange their little posses-

sions comfortably, and rest from their fatigues, while she considered how she could best carry on their education. Slowly, and still a little wearily, she then mounted to her old study, her particular den, as Blanch had sometimes called it, and there, on opening the door, she found Gerard.

"Well met," said Gerard; "I thought you would come up here, as you must have a great deal to think about, and I shall shortly leave you in peace; but first, I wish to prepare you for a change that you must soon perceive in my uncle. I think you will observe that he is much less able to judge for himself; I fear his powers are becoming enfeebled."

Margaret said nothing; the sudden information that her uncle was changed, the sense of how much more attention he ought to receive in consequence from her than formerly, and the recollection of how she had encompassed herself with duties that would demand her utmost time and skill, completely overpowered her; and to Gerard's great surprise, she sat down, and covering her face with her hands, burst into tears, and sobbed violently.

"What, Margaret, Margaret!" he exclaimed, "is this the head of a school, is this the prudent housekeeper? Come, be brave. I will open the window. You must not give way, you know, and make yourself ill, or I shall be obliged to superintend these girls myself!"

Margaret could not help laughing. "But I have been so foolish, Gerard: I thought of that almost all night. Oh, I have made a mistake!"

"What mistake, Margaret?"

"Oh, I have been out to seek for new duties, when there were some at home that were more important. I thought—I thought I was fit for something more than just ordering my uncle's dinner."

"And so you are, Margaret ; you are fit to be a queen, if there was any kingdom vacant that wanted reigning over ! You have been out to find your mission, you know, and have brought it home in the shape of two heiresses, three dunces, one pretty little cherub, and two or three long-armed, overgrown, awkward creatures in short frocks, and with streaming hair ; models of grace and sweetness, no doubt, in the eyes of their mothers ! You have brought it home, and you find another mission grown up for you in your absence, that of watching over our dear old uncle. You shall attend to one of your missions in the morning and afternoon, and the other in the evening. Old nurse is turning out a first-rate house-keeper, and why should she not sit with these girls in the evening while they prepare their lessons ?"

"But who will sit with my uncle, and ride with him, and write his letters in the morning ?"

"I will, if you will leave off crying ; I cannot endure to see girls cry. But I suppose you would say as Lewis did the other day when I told him not to cry because his magpie was dead—that you are not crying, but only just letting a few tears drop down."

"I really have done now, Gerard."

"Then I will go," said Gerard, "and leave you to your meditations ; my uncle has been alone long enough."

So saying, he departed, leaving Margaret in better spirits than before, but still a good deal perplexed as to how her various duties were to be reconciled with one another.



CHAPTER XII.

MARGARET MAKES HERSELF USEFUL.

“ I have lost the dream of Doing,
And the other dream of Done ;
The first spring in the pursuing,
The first pride in the begun.

First recoil from incompleteness in the face of what is won.”

MRS. BROWNING.

MARGARET'S first care was to prepare a schoolroom, and that she found not difficult. Her own studio would be a useless place to her now, unless she gave it up for this purpose; she had no time for private study; and it was conveniently quiet, and well appointed with books, maps, and materials for education.

The half holiday that she had given to her pupils enabled them to rest, look about them, and collect their thoughts. For that day they were all to dine with the Archdeacon and Gerard; but this ceremony over, Margaret consulted with her nurse, and appropriated a large disused parlour to their use, where she decided that their meals should be served, she presiding herself, and where they should sit in the evening while she remained with her uncle.

For the first three weeks after her return home,

Margaret received few accounts of Mrs. Seagrave's state of health, and these varied so much from each other, that she could not place much dependence on them. The fever, as predicted, did turn to typhus, and she survived it; but the pleasure with which Margaret became acquainted with this fact was clouded by anxiety; the German teacher sometimes wrote as if disappointed at the slow progress made by her patient, and Margaret was surprised to find that no message was ever sent to herself, and no reference made to the pupils.

She at length wrote and desired explicit information, and inquired whether Mrs. Seagrave had caused letters to be written to the distant parents of the pupils, informing them where their children were, and under whose superintendence.

In reply, the German teacher wrote a somewhat indignant letter. How could Miss Grant expect that Mrs. Seagrave had troubled herself with anything of the kind, when she had not yet been able to leave her room, and scarcely knew her nurse from her doctor?

Her mind was going, then! Margaret's distress and astonishment were very great; this was the first intimation she had received of the circumstance. And, at Gerard's suggestion, she wrote to the physician who had attended her poor friend, begging him to relieve her mind by telling her what he really thought of his patient's case.

It was some days before this letter was answered. The physician wrote with his former coldness and unconcern. "Mrs. Seagrave had symptoms which made it unlikely she could survive many weeks—her mind was very much enfeebled—he could not hold out any hopes; but Mrs. Seagrave did not suffer much, and her attendants were skilful and kind."

Poor Margaret! she scarcely knew what to do. She had now been six weeks at home, and all the

responsibility of caring for and teaching these girls still rested with her. By Gerard's advice she now wrote to all the parents of her pupils, giving a full account to each of what she had done, but not speaking of Mrs. Seagrave's state as hopeless, lest she should happily not verify the fears of her friend, but recover and wish to resume the care of her pupils.

This done, her life passed in a steady and perhaps somewhat wearisome routine of schoolroom duties, mingled with not a little anxiety about her friend, and sometimes about her uncle, who seemed now to care little for her society, and when she was sitting alone with him, would often send her away to fetch Gerard, never appearing so well pleased as when his nephew was with him, either walking with, or reading to him.

At length, one chilly morning in November, Gerard came up to the schoolroom at twelve o'clock, just as Margaret was dismissing her pupils who were going to take a walk in the park with her nurse. "Polly," he said, as they left the room, "I met the postman this morning, and brought in the letters myself; I kept back one."

Margaret looked up.

"I thought you might like to read it when your school duties were over, and you were alone," he continued; and he laid quietly before her a letter with a slight black edge, and left the room.

Mrs. Seagrave was dead. She had been growing weaker for some days, and had declined to take her food; but she had rallied a little at the last, both in mind and body, the German teacher said, and had sent her love to Margaret. So quietly, so coldly, the little incidents of her death were narrated, so calmly it was added that none ought to regret it, as she would never have been sensible again, that Margaret was not so much

shocked as she would have felt if a less phlegmatic person had written, to find that the good German went on to say that if Miss Grant wanted an assistant to lighten her duties for the time, she should be glad to offer her services on the same terms as Mrs. Seagrave had given ; and thereupon followed a list of the good woman's qualifications.

Margaret wept a good deal over the loss of her first friend, though she felt the force of the reason that had been given against regret ; for who should desire the continuance of life without the precious gift of reason ?

But now her duties accumulated. She must write again to India and Australia, and desire that the parents of her pupils would choose a new school for them, or send for them, and relieve her of her responsibility. In the meantime she mentioned to her uncle the German teacher's proposal to come and help her, and he caught at it, and desired her to close with it at once, which was accordingly done ; and the phlegmatic German once established in her new situation, Margaret found herself more at liberty to attend to the rapidly approaching Christmas duties and festivities, which required more arrangement than usual, as none of her pupils had a home to go to for the recess.

Her character, under the weight of all this responsibility, matured rapidly, and she seemed to gather gravity and steadiness from the necessity of acting in a womanly manner before her pupils and servants ; but Gerard, who had been the first person to open her eyes to her too great gentleness, her impulsiveness, want of dignity, and child-like openness, did not by any means like the change. She was now sufficiently self-reliant to be able to act without advice, consequently she did not want *his* advice ; she had no confidences now to repose in him, for a friend of the other sex

was not the person to be consulted about her difficulties in managing sullen, rebellious, or stupid girls, and she was always so busy that she scarcely ever found time for any conversation with him ; or if he began one, she was soon called away.

" Margaret," he one evening said to her, " this busy life suits you very well, I think. I suppose those notions of yours that you should never be of use have vanished now ?"

" Yes," said Margaret, after a pause for reflection. " Shall we ring for candles, Gerard ?"

" If you wish it, I will ring; but my uncle is slumbering peacefully, and the firelight is pleasant, why should we not sit idle a few minutes ?"

" Idle !" exclaimed Margaret, " Oh, I have so much to do ! and it is nearly five o'clock."

" Can I help you with what you have to do ?"

" Can you cut out some duffle cloaks for the poor old women ?"

" No."

" Can you scold Primrose for being untidy, and for teasing her sister ?"

" No."

" Can you hint to my dear German that I should be thankful if she could control her love of good eating a little, and especially if she would not keep nuts and barley-sugar in her pocket ?"

" No."

" Do you think you could order the poor people's Christmas dinner ?"

" I am afraid not indeed, Polly."

" Then you cannot help me !"

" You might set me something to do that would be more befitting my sex and character; I am a modest young fellow, and might blush if that German giantess took my hint amiss. A woman of your age and experience, Margaret, should consider the sensitiveness of a youth like me !"

"How long have you been so young, Gerard?"

"Ever since you have been so old, Miss Grant. You are thirty, that is your precise age, but you don't look it, for, as people say, 'you wear well.'"

"If I kept a school—a preparatory school for young gentlemen—you would just suit me, then, for a pupil," said Margaret.

"What would you teach me, Margaret—anything more than I have learned in your school already?"

"I would teach you that people grow older as time goes on, and not younger; I would teach you to be consistent—"

"What! am I inconsistent?"

"Very. You used always to declare that I was a child."

"Well, I saw that you were a child, and a long way behind me, so I stood still to look at you, and you ran on before me! I now treat you accordingly: it is you that are changed, not I. How am I inconsistent?"

"I do not see that I am changed," said Margaret, thoughtfully.

"Do you find all this too much for you, Margaret?"

"All what?"

"All this housekeeping and teaching and responsibility?"

"Oh, the housekeeping I had become accustomed to before I began to teach, and now that I have become accustomed to teaching, I find that really the trouble of it is not worth mentioning. I did think at first that to give up so much time, and go through so much routine, was great self-denial; but now I rather like it."

"Poor thing! the old story over again!"

"There is so much in habit," proceeded Mar-

garet. "But, Gerard, *do* ring the bell ; I really cannot waste any more time."

So Gerard rose and did as he was requested, and he and Margaret sedulously made themselves useful, each in a different way ; Margaret accepting the tasks that had devolved on her, and finding an engrossing interest in them ; he looking out for occupation, partly from principle, and partly that he might keep her out of his thoughts, for she occupied more of them than he felt to be good for him, considering that he appeared to occupy daily less and less of hers.

So passed the winter, with little to mark it excepting the removal of four of the pupils, whose parents wrote from India and mentioned the schools to which they desired their daughters might be transferred. Margaret had still five on her hands, but the Miss Whites were not of their number, and she found this so great a relief, that it seemed no trouble worth mentioning to retain the others. They had now been under her charge nearly nine months, reckoning as one the month that she had passed as their governess at Mrs. Seagrave's ; but at the end of April letters arrived from Australia which threatened to cause her more trouble than she had ever yet experienced. They were from the guardian of two of the girls, who was also the father of the remaining three ; they were couched in terms of the deepest gratitude, and the writer expressing himself extremely thankful for Miss Grant's kindness, and sensible both from his daughters' letters and her own that they could not be in better or more judicious hands, begged that she would herself choose a school for them and his little wards, and place them either with some friend of her own, or some person whose principles and manners she approved.

Margaret really felt daunted by this great con-

fidence reposed in her by a stranger, and was more unwilling to undertake the responsibility than she had been to teach and superintend these same girls from week to week. Gerard was almost always away from home, and they saw at all times very little of each other; and the Archdeacon she could not consult, for there had come up, scarcely by perceptible degrees, a cloud over his brain; and though he was still capable of undertaking such clerical duties as his physical strength permitted, he evidently could not fix his attention on matters of every-day life. He was pleased to have these girls in the house; they never gave him the slightest trouble, and always treated him with great respect; but he could give no opinion as to their proper destination, and he once or twice startled Margaret by inquiring whether Mrs. Seagrave would not shortly be well enough to take them back again. When she gently reminded him of Mrs. Seagrave's death, he appeared distressed, and answered hastily that he had only forgotten for a moment; but Margaret knew and felt that the real responsibility was not stirred from her shoulders by any consultations with him, and she accordingly began to make inquiries; but there was some objection to every school she heard of, and none of them pleased her well enough to be selected. She was perhaps too particular in her requirements, or she was not fortunate in hearing of desirable schools, for the middle of June arrived and she had not yet met with any ladies to whom she felt that she could commit her charge.

And now, as she had hitherto failed to meet with what she required, and as she began to feel tired and in want of rest, she sent her charge to the sea-side, to a quiet little village, under the care of the Fraulein and her nurse; there they were to spend the six weeks' recess, while

she luxuriated in the possession of leisure and quietude.

Very quiet indeed was the month that followed. She was quite alone with her uncle, and he, in Gerard's absence, seemed to return to his preference for her society above that of any other person. The weather was warm and genial, and the good old man appeared to enjoy it, for he spent many hours with her in the hay-fields and on the heath. She returned to some of her old pursuits, and began to feel that though there had been great pleasure in exerting herself, there was more in this delightful repose, which would have been unbroken but for the constant inquiries by letter concerning schools and governesses.

A month had passed thus, when one evening Gerard came home unexpectedly. He had but two months left now of his two years' leave of absence, but having some time since made up his mind that Margaret had been quite in earnest when she said to Mrs. Maitland that under no circumstances could she entertain a preference for him; he had not desired to be more in her society than he could help: and as for her, the pressure of circumstances had driven him from her thoughts; and though she sometimes felt that he was not so affectionate and friendly now as he had been formerly, she did not distress herself about this circumstance, for the simple reason that she had not time to dwell upon it.

But this re-union was, notwithstanding, very pleasant to her; it brought the first days of Gerard's return vividly before her, and as she sat with the Archdeacon in the garden, with her dog Nero on one side and Gerard on the other, she fell into a reverie that the voices of the aged friend and the young one did not at all disturb. She recalled her childish disputes with Gerard, her

disappointment that Blanch had not been able to return the same kind of affection that she had bestowed on her, her old longings for some decided line of duty, and the very different feelings that she now entertained respecting that decided line now her wish had been fulfilled, and she possessed it.

"It is true," thought Margaret, "that distance lends enchantment to the view. I longed to be useful. I believe I am useful; but the romance of the thing vanished the moment it was translated into action. Well, I prayed that I might be permitted to do a little *work* in this beautiful world that CHRIST died for, just to feel that my gratitude for the 'inestimable benefit' was not altogether fruitless gratitude; and what is the work now it is done? why, so full of imperfections, so entirely incomplete, that I am glad I have had it to do, if it is only for the dissipation of one delusion which I must have laboured under without it. I must have thought—I should have thought that I *could* do something completely and well, and from a good and single motive. Now I know that partly from necessity I have gone on, partly from habit, partly from the love of influencing others. My notions and opinions I have contrived to impart to some of these girls, and I acknowledge to myself that I could find sufficient pleasure and reward in being allowed to do this to counterbalance the trouble of teaching, without being obliged to fall back upon duty to sustain me.

'I have lost the dream of Doing,
And the other dream of Done.'

That dream of 'Done' is hard to part with, but I give it up for this time, and for all my life. I have been allowed to say this is 'done'; and looking at it when done, I find it 'less than nothing



and vanity.' I am ashamed to see its littleness of motive—to see how it falls short of full accomplishment. I am ashamed to—"

A hand upon her arm arrested her attention. Gerard desired to draw her notice to what her uncle was saying.

"Long since, when I was quite a young man, my boy," were the words he was saying, "there were no dahlias and geraniums, nor your fine calceolarias, then; and when my father planted this bed of hollyhocks, they were reckoned the finest in this part of the country. She was very fond of these double primrose-coloured flowers, and I would never allow the bed to be disturbed after she died."

"Miss Clarissa Fane, you mean, uncle?" said Gerard.

"Yes, to be sure. Ah, it must be nearly sixty years ago now. She wore a sacque and coat, and she came and sat just here, where we sit now; she was a fine creature. Ladies have never looked so well since hair powder went out."

"Was she amiable?" asked Margaret, anxious to continue the conversation respecting this lady, whose name she had never but once heard mentioned before; but as the old man made no reply, Gerard shortly observed, "And so sixty years ago, sir, you sat under these hollyhocks with her."

"I brought her some strawberries in a leaf—pretty creature," said the Archdeacon, not looking at them, but returning mentally to the far past. "I was at college then. Well, it was all for the best, and I thank God I have led a happy life on the whole. Her mother was a very proud woman, and looked down upon me and my family; but in the world where all is equal we shall meet again, and it will not be long—it cannot be long."

"No, uncle," said Margaret in a soothing tone,

for he spoke in a troubled and somewhat distraught manner.

"And I am satisfied that it should be according to His will," proceeded the aged clergyman. "Is not the longest day passed, Margaret?"

"Oh yes, much more than a month ago."

"It seems a long time now since night; the days grow longer and longer. Have I done my work?"

"Yes, uncle; you said you had nothing to do to-day but to dictate those two letters."

"I'll just take a doze then."

"Will you go in, uncle, and lie on the sofa?"

"No, child, no. Give me that air cushion; it's only for a little while that I want to sleep."

Margaret placed it under his head as he reclined against the grassy bank. "He was asleep almost before his head reached it," said Gerard; and they sat beside him for a long time, both silent, and lost in meditation. The sky was one mass of red and glowing colour, heralding the setting of the sun, whose long slanting rays cast a bright halo around the head of the sleeping old man.

At length she rose softly, and sauntered across the grass towards the house. She had not reached it, when she heard a cry behind her which at first sounded like her name, and she stopped to listen, but thought she must have been mistaken. She was in the shrubbery, and the trees hid from her view the bed of hollyhocks; so she went quietly on, and was mounting the steps into the house, when heavy hasty steps coming fast behind her arrested her. "Margaret, Margaret," cried Gerard, "come back, come back!" He turned the instant he had spoken, and flew back without her; but she had seen his white face, and she hurried after him, fully aware of what she had to look upon.

The Archdeacon was asleep, but they were not see his waking.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE HEIR.

“Oh, there are hours, ay, *moments*, that contain
Feelings that years may pass and never bring.”
MRS. NORTON.

HE shock of her uncle’s death proved too much for Margaret’s strength ; and the funeral was over before she had been able to leave her room. The evening after this event she crept down stairs in the dusk, and came into the deserted study ; Gerard was there, and as he turned from the window and came towards her, she put out her hands and turned away her face, exclaiming, “Don’t speak to me, Gerard ; don’t say anything at all ; I am not able to bear it.”

Gerard drew back again ; and Margaret, reclining in the corner of a sofa, was silent for a long time, striving to recover her self-possession, and endure the full sense that now came upon her, of her loss, and her altered life. At length regaining the mastery over herself, but not till her limbs trembled, and her head was giddy from the effects of grief and illness, she remembered how late it was, and rose half unconsciously to ring the bell and order tea.

Her hand was on the bell, when a sudden

thought flashed into her mind—"Whose servants are these now? are they mine? have I any right to give orders here?" A feeling of anger against herself came with the thought—anger that she should be thinking of her uncle's will already; and she stood irresolute, scarcely knowing whether to ring or to return, for Gerard was looking at her; and she thought he showed a consciousness of her thought, for he said, "What were you going to do, my dear Margaret?"

"I thought perhaps it might be tea-time," she replied hesitatingly; whereupon he came up to her, and putting his hand above hers on the bell-rope, pulled it, and so terminated her difficulty for the present.

And now Margaret found it possible to say something. The tea came in, and gave her some quiet occupation, and made a little talk between them; talk only, however, on indifferent matters, for neither was willing to speak on any others; and Margaret could not trust herself to think about, or to look back on, the past.

She took a book when tea was over, and sat with it before her, but could not read; and Gerard was as constrained as herself; he was restless too, and once again he seemed about to accost her, but her pleading, "O, Gerard, pray do not talk to me," stopped him, and he answered, "There are things that must be said shortly, Margaret; I will say them whenever you tell me that you are able to bear them."

He spoke very seriously and kindly, Margaret thought, and she thanked him; she knew he must mean that there were business matters to be discussed between them, and she knew she could neither bear such discussions, nor feel interested in them at present.

"If there is anything that must be done at once," she presently found nerve to say, "I hope

you will do it, Gerard, without reference to me ; I shall be sure to think it right when it is done."

Gerard did not reply by thanking her for her confidence ; he only said, " You will soon be able to do whatever is needful, Margaret ;" and Margaret thought he sighed as if very much vexed and harassed ; but he presently added very gently and kindly, " The prayer-bell is ringing, Margaret ; will you go up stairs now ? you could not bear just yet to see *me* reading prayers for the household ?"

Margaret needed no second bidding, but hastily retired ; and for the next few days she shrank so much from any conference with Gerard, that he kept aloof from her, though he sometimes seemed vexed at her distance, though not at her low spirits, which she at present had made no effort to throw off.

But at last, one morning on coming down, Gerard found Margaret deep in her household accounts ; and though she had evidently been weeping bitterly, she was roused to action, and seemed to have suddenly recovered her usual nerve and energy. He sat down beside her, pleased and relieved at the change ; " You are better, Margaret," he said.

" Better ; and yet I have a new trouble," said Margaret. " I have got a letter, that—that has roused me from my selfish sorrow, and given me a fresh spring for energy."

" A letter !" repeated Gerard, a good deal disappointed.

" Yes, from Emma Mostyn, about my poor Blanch—she is a widow," continued Margaret, bursting into tears, and sobbing, " and she is already on her passage home, and Mrs. Mostyn says, totally unprovided for. O my poor Blanch ! so early to have all her prospects destroyed, and her happiness wrecked ! "

"What did poor Stewart die of?" said Gerard, a good deal shocked.

"Cholera, Emma Mostyn writes, supposing that I have already heard of it from Blanch; but she very seldom writes; I have only had four letters from her. What is to become of her, Gerard?"

Gerard said nothing; he was lost in thought.

"I did not think I could have read such news, and be so little moved," said Margaret, rousing herself, and drying her tears; "but Gerard, this makes me more willing to hear what you have wished to say to me about business—perhaps I may be able to help Blanch in maintaining herself, and assisting her family. There are my pupils—I could at least give them over to her care—they would be the commencement of a school for her; and if capital is wanted—"

Here Margaret paused, willing that Gerard should go on and say anything that he had to say; but he sat with his arms folded, and his eyes intent on the carpet, so long, that her patience could hold out no longer. "Am I to hear nothing?" she said, laying her hand on his arm. "You were very anxious to tell me something the other day, and now—"

"Now you are willing to hear, I have nothing to say!"

"So it seems, certainly, Gerard."

"What do you expect me to say?"

"To say what will show me how far I have it in my power to help Blanch."

"Blanch! still Blanch! she always stands in my light!"

"Poor Blanch!" said Margaret, half reproachfully.

"What I had to say the other day, would not have helped you at all to the knowledge of how much capital you might place at her disposal."

"Indeed," said Margaret; and perhaps at another

time she might have asked what then it might have been ; but now, intent on Blanch, she only added, "but I must know these business matters in time, Gerard, and why not *now*, particularly as you return so soon to Bombay?"

"I do not return at all," said Gerard quickly.

Margaret was surprised, but notwithstanding, she continued quietly, "I must know all some day ; but if the affairs are not settled yet, I do not want to inconvenience you by—by pressing you for information ;" and she added with hesitation, "perhaps if a little money was wanted on Blanch's return, I could have it advanced."

Like a person who feels greatly relieved, or delighted with the individual whose bright idea has caused him such relief, Gerard now looked up, cleared his brow, and smiled with his naturally frank and sudden brightness. "You shall have any sum required advanced," he said. "And as for looking into accounts and settling matters, I should be very glad, Margaret, if you would permit me to leave that till this day three months. In the meantime—the meantime," he repeated, looking about him as if to gain a few moments for reflection. "Let me see ; what was I saying ?"

Margaret did not help him, but sat blushing on the sofa at his right hand ; for it had suddenly flashed into her mind that she and Gerard could hardly both make this house their home, as the relationship between them was but distant.

"What a stupid fellow I am !" Gerard presently exclaimed. "I have it, Margaret ! our previous discussion confused me a little. It is one of the provisions of the will that this establishment shall not be broken up for four months after our dear uncle's death. Will you stay, Margaret, and keep it on as usual ?"

"No," said Margaret hastily. "I shall go to the sea-side—I must go to my pupils."

"Then," said Gerard, neither combating her resolution, nor making any comment on it, "I suppose I *must* stay here. I shall be very lonely without you," he proceeded, and would have added more, but that she burst into tears, and fled from the room overpowered.

He threw open the window, and walked all over the garden, inspecting every portion of it; he then made the circuit of all the lower rooms; finally, he mounted to the schoolroom, Margaret's old studio, and there he sat for more than an hour deep in thought. At last he heard the sound of wheels; and looking out, he saw the little green chaise moving away from the house, and he walked down into the drawing-room, and rung the bell. A housemaid entered.

Gerard inquired of her the history of the little green chaise, and its leaving the house unknown to him; but the housemaid knew nothing of the matter; so the *new master* of the house made a progress through all the sitting-rooms, seeking in vain for Margaret. The nurse was at the sea-side, so Margaret had no Abigail for whom he could ring, and by whom he could demand explanations; and he walked about disconsolately, till he came to the morning room, when on her Davenport he saw a note lying with his name on the envelope; it ran thus—

"DEAR GERARD,

"Excuse my having omitted to wish you good-bye. I have felt that the best thing for me was to go to my pupils. You have been very kind, and I thank you.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"MARGARET GRANT.

"P.S. I shall write to you to-morrow, and tell you where all the keys and the account books are."

Gerard read the little note with a keen perception of the pain it must have cost Margaret thus to quit the home of her childhood. "I wonder whether she suspects?" he thought to himself.

The place to which Margaret had withdrawn herself was not more than twelve miles from Thorley, and the little green chaise came back that evening; but Gerard in the meantime had received letters by the Indian mail, and was so much absorbed in their contents that he had not much time to regret Margaret's absence, and he merely inquired how Miss Grant appeared to be after the journey; and having received the customary answer of the lower classes when asked such a question, concerning a person who is ill or in sorrow, that Miss Grant was "as well as could be expected," he applied himself again to his despatches, and admitted in his own mind a very unpalatable fact, namely, that he must go over to Bombay, if only for two or three months, or his affairs there would not easily be settled.

"Such being the case," he argued, "the sooner Margaret knows the real state of the case the better. Shall I go over and see her, or shall I write?" He hesitated a long time as he sat in the lonely study, and he did *not* write. The next day he was so long in considering whether he would ride over and tell her what it behoved she should know, that the morning was past before he had decided not to do it. "After all," he said to himself with a deep sigh, "it is not an easy thing to tell a lady, who has been brought up in comfort and luxury, that she is perfectly destitute."

"A letter for you, sir," said a servant, coming in. "Miss Grant has sent nurse over for some boxes, and desired her to give this to you."

Gerard took the letter, and carried it into Margaret's studio before he opened it.

First came some information respecting keys and account-books ; then some grateful sentences relative to the kindness which she had received all her life from her uncle ; then this sentence :

" A little hint, dear Gerard, will convey to the mind a great deal of information ; and a very trifling act of yours, so trifling that perhaps you have forgotten it, has impressed my mind with a belief that I have vainly endeavoured to shake off. I hesitated one night whether to ring the bell ; you, seeing my doubt whether I had any right to give an order, and feeling no such doubt on your own part, hastily rang it yourself, and so you resolved my doubt, and exchanged it for certainty that I *had no* right. But I looked on this certainty as resting on a very slender foundation, and when I heard from Mrs. Mostyn I tried to combat it, and wished to have it disproved ; so I asked you several questions, and you could not answer them ; therefore I will tell you what it is that I entertain as my fixed opinion—namely, that the will of my dear uncle was made very long ago, perhaps before my birth, and that my name does not occur in it. This opinion was dissipated for a little time yesterday, when, as a last attempt to discover the truth, I asked you whether I could have some money advanced in case I wanted it, and you readily declared that I could ; but I have since remembered that the way in which I put the question would enable you to answer as you did, without informing me whether the money so advanced was to be my own. A little time suffices for making one reconciled to a loss when a greater loss has come before it. I am reconciled to dependence on my own exertions—at least I think I am, for all the hard part of such a lot has been taken away in the course of Providence ; my work has been prepared for me, and my livelihood is

already in my hands. I have only to go on as I have begun, and I believe I can help Blanch by making her my partner."

"Extraordinary girl," thought Gerard, "she has lighted on the exact truth; and now what am I to do? I am quite powerless, I know, to persuade her to take a share. She never says anything about my being sole heir; but I am sure she found out that also by my one inadvertent pull at a bit of string. What she says is so perfectly true, too, that I have not a word to say against it; but how ridiculous it appears that a girl like her—a vehement, an impulsive, a tender-hearted creature—should be set at the head of a school at her age! even that, I suppose, is to be made right in her eyes by the presence of the poor young widow—two children together they will be.

"I think in a day or two I will go down and see what can be done," continued Gerard. "If she is bent on carrying on a school, nothing that I can say will turn her from it; but she will want money, and that she *must* consent to derive from me."

So Gerard sat down to answer Margaret's letter. He told her she was correct in her belief that the will had made no provision for her; he informed her that he was left the sole heir, but he gave her the date at which the last codicil had been added, and as this was only a few months after her birth and before the time when she became dependent upon her uncle, it was not remarkable that her name was omitted. "Anything else that I have to say to you," continued Gerard, "I will leave till we meet." He did not add one word of condolence, for to condole with her on disappointed expectation so recently after the real sorrow for a heavy loss of her best friend, would have seemed out of place; and besides, she was bearing this so coolly and so bravely that he did not feel that he

had courage to express regret, except in the most simple and moderate terms. He was the gainer by whatever she had not received, and this checked him ; while the sober certainty that it was quite useless to express his desire to make a provision for her out of the property, held him back from proposing such a thing. He would not make it needful for her to thank him for wishing to give her what he was certain she would not accept.

Several letters had arrived that morning for Margaret. Gerard put his with them, and gave them to her nurse, informing the good woman that he should ride over in a few days and see her mistress. In the meantime he went to town to make arrangements for his journey overland to India ; but necessary business detained him so long that he returned to Thorley with only four days left before the one fixed on for joining his vessel at Southampton.

He had a great deal to do ; his first care was to arrange his house, his second to make his will, his third was to ride over and take his leave of Margaret ; and it is a singular fact that though he was very careless in general concerning personal appearance, he spent some time in his dressing-room before setting out, and bestowed particular pains on his adornment.

He rode over for the last six miles by the sea-beach, and the white house where Margaret lived at first appeared like an indistinct speck on the distant cliff—he saw it nearly all the way ; it was a square, new, bare, and altogether unromantic looking place, and it seemed to grow less and less home-like as he drew nearer to it.

He saw the pupils out on the sea-weed that covered the low rocks on the beach ; they had on red petticoats and gowns, festooned according to the approved custom ; they also had flapping hats,

and little tin pails, wherein to collect sea anemones, limpets, hermit crabs, and other desirable inmates for their aquaria ; this he ascertained while searching with his eyes among them for Margaret, but as soon as they had assured him that she was not there, he turned them towards the house and looked in at all the windows, but he did not see her.

"Is Miss Grant at home ?" he asked, when his ring at the bell was answered.

No, Miss Grant was not at home, she was gone to Southampton to meet a lady from India.

"What was the lady's name—was it Stewart ?"

Yes, the servant thought Mrs. Stewart was the lady's name—she was almost sure of it. She did not know how long her mistress would be out; but would the gentleman walk in ?

The gentleman did walk in : and then he heard from the German teacher that Miss Grant had set off the previous morning for Southampton with her nurse. Mrs. Mostyn was very ill, and could not meet or even see her daughter. Strong nervous excitement, brought on by a confirmed spine complaint, the German teacher believed ; but Mrs. Stewart was to come and live with Miss Grant, she knew.

"And when would they return ?" asked Gerard.

"In about a week."

Here was very bad news, specially aggravated by the fact that Margaret had not written to give any address to her German friend.

Gerard was a good deal annoyed, but he took the matter very calmly to all outward appearance ; and after partaking of some refreshment, and charming the Fraulein by his affability and politeness, he took his leave and left Thorley that night for Southampton.

Gerard had sailed three days when Margaret

drove up to her door with Blanch at her side—a pale, silent, fragile creature, the shadow of her former self, dressed in the widow's cap, which only served to draw attention to the extreme youthfulness of her face. But Blanch, after her deep affliction, had lost neither energy nor composure; she was able to converse with Margaret already, concerning her future plans and prospects; she could enter this new home without giving way to tears, and she could talk of her husband—his devotedness to his work and his usefulness, as well as his tender affection for herself—with a marvellous self-command, which, though it seemed like coldness to those who did not understand her character, was a relief and comfort to Margaret, because it showed that her bodily and mental health had not utterly given way, and that she was in a position to be assisted and even consoled.

Blanch was greatly fatigued after her journey, and Margaret saw her comfortably settled in bed before she came down to inquire how matters had progressed in her absence.

All the news of the household was soon told, and the Fraulein hastened to relate the incident of Gerard's visit; and it was then that Margaret learned for the first time that he had sailed, and she should not see him again. She had a strange sense, which she never had felt before, of utter isolation and great responsibility. She was alone, with several pupils entirely under her care, a hired house in which she was living, a sick and sorrowing friend, whom she had urged to take up her abode with her, and no one to ask counsel of, no one to care for her, and no one even to find fault with her!

She sat silent for some time, with her feet on the fender, till the Fraulein dropped her cotton reel; then she said, "Do not let me detain you, if

you wish to retire." So the Fraulein took up her bed-candle, and Margaret was left alone.

"When I heard you were gone," wrote a pretty little child to a gentleman who had played with her a good deal, "I got under the table and cried a long while."

Margaret did not get under the table, but she did "cry a long while." Gerard had been her companion, the only person who had paid her what are called attentions; he had been interested in her, and she had repaid his interest. Now he was gone, and she was alone in the world; she could not leave Blanch, for Blanch depended on her for comfort, and was delicate besides, therefore ought not to be disturbed with other people's troubles. Gerard, she had been informed, went away in very good spirits. Well, she must do without him, she would, she could; it was evident he could do without her. She would work hard; indeed she must work hard, for it would be some time before Blanch could help her, and in the meantime everything, humanly speaking, depended on her and her exertions.





CHAPTER XIV.

HOME.

“Have and hold, then and there,
Her from head to foot,
Breathing and mute,
Passive and yet aware,
In the grasp of my steady stare.”

ROBERT BROWNING.

IX months passed away; the hot suns of India blazed over Gerard's head, and the snows of an English winter settled on Margaret's roof. It was the end of March. The pupils were learning their lessons in the schoolroom under the Fraulein's superintendence, while Margaret and Blanch, the latter with an infant of five months on her knee, sat in a quiet dining-room over the fire. The evening was closing in fast; Margaret was silent because she was very tired, Blanch, because she was listening to the soft breathing of her child.

At length Margaret's attitude arrested the attention of the young mother. “You are more than commonly tired to-day, my dear,” she said. “Suppose you lie down on the sofa, and go to sleep till the tea comes in.”

Blanch did not speak as if she was sad; her fair

face, with its snowy cap, had a calm that was more than resignation; and when she looked at her child, his little smile and soft cooing mouth brought an expression of contentment into her own features.

The little fellow was fast asleep now, with one of his mother's fingers clasped in his small dimpled hand. Blanch would like to have removed her work from the sofa, and arranged the cushions for Margaret; but she could not unclasp the baby fingers with their "waxen touches" without wakening the infant, so she contented herself with another admonition to Margaret to lie down.

"I do not know why I am so tired to-day," Margaret said. "I have not done more than usual; and the girls are so much better, that it would be absurd to be anxious about them now."

"That is the very reason," observed Blanch; "you have had so much anxiety, watching, and nursing, almost ever since you brought me home, my dear, that you have hardly had time to perceive your own weariness, till now that there is an interval of rest."

Margaret shut her eyes, and fell fast asleep. The window curtains were not drawn, and the crescent moon rose, and hung over the cold grey water, making a golden pathway across it to the clearly defined horizon. A few fishing-vessels rocked across from time to time, and then vanished into the dark again; while the measured thunder of the breaking waves gradually became more distinct, and overpowered the slight sounds that were made in the house, for the tide was rising, and was within an hour of its height.

Blanch was so lost in thought, that when the door was slowly opened, and a tiny maid with a cap and white apron on peeped in, she started, and startled the baby in his sleep.

"If you please, ma'am, a gentleman has called," said the little maid.

"Show the gentleman into the drawing-room," replied Mrs. Stewart.

"If you please, ma'am, I can't," proceeded the child, "because the gentleman is rubbing his shoes."

Blanch heard a noise, as of some one rubbing his shoes on the door-mat; but before she could repeat her order, a voice asked without, "May I come in, Margaret?" and straightway a gentleman unknown marched in, and the small maid shut the door behind him.

Margaret was asleep on the opposite side of the fire, which was shining on her reclining figure, her shut eyes, and long waving hair. The stranger stopped short, himself in shadow, as soon as he beheld her; and he stood gazing at her so long, that Blanch had plenty of time fully to decide on his identity; and when at length his eyes rested on her face, she rose from her rocking-chair, with the baby on her arm, holding out her hand, and saying, "This is indeed an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Grant."

Gerard took her hand, but he did not speak; the sight of her dress, and her sleeping charge, were enough to keep him silent.

"Will you come into the drawing-room?" said Blanch, for she half suspected that Margaret would be very much startled at the sudden sight of Gerard; perhaps on first waking, might be betrayed into an exclamation of joy, that she might afterwards regret.

"No, thank you," replied Gerard; "I prefer to remain; pray allow me to sit here."

"Tiresome man," thought Blanch. And Gerard crossed the rug, and sank contentedly into an easy chair close to the foot of the sofa, with a sigh of

such weariness, that she could not find in her heart to disturb him.

"Are you only tired with the long journey?" thought Blanch; "or have you been ill?" But his profile only was presented to her, while with chin resting on his hand, he consoled himself for all that might have vexed him by a long uninterrupted gaze, that seemed to afford him inexpressible pleasure and contentment. "I do not think I need trouble myself," thought Blanch, "as to what Margaret may say when she wakes; if she is to meet such a look as that, let her say what she pleases."

Still Margaret slept; and at length Gerard, turning to Blanch, said softly, "She is cold, Mrs. Stewart; will you lay this shawl over her?" He unfolded a fine India shawl as he spoke, which he had carried into the room on his arm.

Blanch laid her baby down, took the beautiful thing from his hands, and spread it over Margaret; the rich colours became her; and when she was enveloped in it, almost from head to foot, Gerard rose, and drawing still nearer, seemed to derive great satisfaction from seeing her arrayed in his gift.

"She sleeps well," he presently said to Blanch. "She must have been very tired, or she could not rest so languidly."

He spoke almost in a tone of reproach, Blanch thought, as if perhaps he thought she might have saved Margaret some of this fatigue.

"She has had a great deal to tire her for a long time past; a great deal of anxiety and exertion," she replied.

"Indeed," he answered.

"Yes," proceeded Blanch. "I was not able to help her at all when first I came here, but on the contrary depended a good deal on her, and was

very weak. Then I was extremely ill, and not expected to live for several weeks. That was a great anxiety to her, and a great trial to her affectionate heart. Then I no sooner became stronger and able to do a little to help her in the schoolroom, than the pupils took the measles, and some of them had it very severely—one, the youngest, died; her parents are in India. Margaret felt severely the responsibility; and besides, she was very fond of that dear little patient creature. My little one has also had the complaint; and for several days he was ill enough to cause us a great deal of anxiety. Why is it so long since you have written, Mr. Grant?"

"I have also been ill," replied Gerard. "Was my silence another anxiety to her?"

"Very likely it was," answered Blanch, cautiously.

"She never spoke of it as such, then?" asked Gerard.

Blanch hesitated; she had known that Margaret was anxious about Gerard; but as his name had not been mentioned for several weeks, and Margaret had never expressed surprise at receiving no letters, she was obliged to answer, "No."

"Never spoke of it even to her nearest friend," thought Gerard. "Come, that is more than I could have expected. She seems as if she must have felt it strongly, or I know nothing of her."

"Well," he said, gently rising, and moving to the back of the sofa, "if she sleeps much longer, I must awaken her."

"Excuse me," said Blanch; "you must not, Mr. Grant; it would startle her."

"But I expect visitors at home; they will have arrived very soon, and I must return shortly."

A servant of larger growth here came in, followed by the little maid—the one carrying a tea-

tray, the other a plate of toast. Gerard took that opportunity to make a little more noise than their entrance had occasioned, by putting a log of wood on the fire; Blanch also made the tea without any attempts at unusual quietness; but still the sleeper slept on; and Gerard lingered about the sofa, though Margaret's features were still illuminated only by the light of the wood fire, which was now blazing and crackling under the log that he had just supplied.

Blanch was just thinking of pouring out the tea, when her baby awoke, and she was obliged to carry him out of the room.

She did not know what a relief her absence was to Gerard; and Margaret in the midst of her deep dream, did not know that something from the real world was influencing it—when sitting, as she seemed to be, under a group of Indian fig-trees, she looked up and saw Gerard advancing towards her.

In a dream we are not easily surprised; but Margaret felt the gladness of relief, when he sat down beside her, and took her hand in his; how warm and cordial was the clasp of that hand in the dream! how vivid the sensation of his speaking to her by her name! The Indian trees seemed to be waving overhead, and the sunshine was very bright, she thought. Moreover, she had a small spinning-wheel on her knee—an Indian spinning-wheel; and while he held her hand, he was hindering her from drawing out the thread. “Is this you at last, my beloved?” said he in the dream. “I have wanted you very often, and very much.” Then looking down on her lap, and on her hands, she perceived suddenly that she had become a child again, quite a child; her little hand was folded in Gerard's clasp; but she knew in her dream that she was very tired and helpless.

"What have you come all this long way for?" she was asked; and she answered, "O, Gerard, I came to find you; for my uncle is dead, and I am a child now, and I thought you would take care of me." Thereupon she wept in her dream, for she knew that she had been desolate, and she was afraid Gerard should go away again; but he took her up on his knee, she thought, and said, "Margaret, Margaret." The words were so distinct, that she awoke sobbing, and found herself sitting up on her sofa, her head leaning on the shoulder of some one, as it had seemed to do in her dream. She sobbed again, and for an instant was powerless through the certainty of Gerard's presence, not through surprise, her dream had been too vivid for that.

"You are awake; you know me," he said, suffering her to release herself.

"Yes; you are Gerard. I am glad you are come home."

"What sorrowful thing had you been dreaming of, my very dear Margaret?"

"I am very glad to see you," said Margaret, evading the question. "I have thought sometimes that I should never see or hear of you again."

"I have been ill, extremely ill; there have been times, Margaret, when I have longed for you very much."

"I cannot see you, it is so dark; please turn your face so that the light may shine on it."

"There, are you satisfied? If you are, I am not; you are paler than when I went away, my little Polly; and those lustrous eyes of yours are larger than ever. I am repentant to think that I awoke you when you were so tired. I am sure you have been tossed a great deal lately on the waves of this troublesome world."

"I suppose I must be tired," Margaret answered, by way of apology, for being compelled to yield, as she now found herself doing, to the crying fit that she had begun in her dream. She was very much ashamed of herself; but struggle as she would, she could not prevent it, and for two or three minutes she wept as if her heart would break.

"Polly," Gerard then said in a composed tone of voice, "how long is a poor fellow to kneel on the hearth-rug to be looked at?"

"I didn't know you were kneeling, Gerard."

"Didn't you?" replied Gerard; "then I shall rise, Miss Grant. I ought to be on my way home, for I expect visitors—two ladies—and one of them is as lovely as—"

"As Henrietta was?" asked Margaret, rallying.

"Quite as lovely."

"What, have you got a new '*ideal?*' "

"Yes, I have. I took it with me to India, and I have brought it back again."

"What are the names of these ladies, Gerard?" asked Margaret calmly.

"Lady Anne Glamorgan, and Mrs. Clarke. Clarke himself is coming on in a day or two."

"Nonsense; I thought one of them was the 'ideal.' "

"Oh, you did!" exclaimed Gerard in a tone of chagrin.

"Instead of which they turn out to be only two of the officers' wives."

"Just so: and if you could have seen the house, Polly; such confusion, such a set of servants, everything so completely changed for the worse."

"I have heard that matters are not well managed there," observed Margaret.

"What a good thing it would be if somebody

would undertake to set them right again, and manage them better!"

"Would it?"

"And also manage me."

"You had better ask your 'ideal' lady to undertake it, then," said Margaret, with an irrepressible sigh.

"But will she?"

"I don't know," replied Margaret. "But, Gerard, I must give you some tea; and will you be kind enough to ring for candles?"

Gerard rose, and the damp that had fallen upon his spirits was evident enough; the words repeated by his Aunt Maitland rang in his ears. The candles were brought in.

After her weeping fit, Margaret was now quite composed, and she stood before the mirror and arranged her ribbons, which had been rumpled while she slept. Then she poured out the tea, and brought a cup to him, as he sat moodily in an easy chair, setting it on a small table that stood beside him.

At that moment she first observed the beautiful shawl, which was lying in a confused heap on the sofa, just as she had thrown it off.

"What is this? where did this shawl come from?" she asked.

"Is it not yours?" said Gerard, roused from his depression; "I saw you wearing it just now."

"Mine! no. When did you see me arrayed in it?"

"When you were asleep."

"Nonsense, Gerard. You brought it, I am sure."

"Well, put it on, and let me see you in it. You like Indian shawls; I have heard you say so."

"Yes; but my uncle used to say I was too young to wear one."

"That is a matter of taste. I think you never look so well as in a shawl. Tell me, Margaret, am I too old to have the pleasure of seeing you arrayed in a present of mine? Will you have it? Will you accept it, if I tell you what a great many times I have thought about the improbability of ever living to give it you?"

"Yes, Gerard, I will."

"Then let me put it on. What made you sigh?"

"No matter. I have said I would have it; put it on. But you have no business really to bring presents to plain cousins, when your realized ideal goes without. But perhaps you have more than one shawl. Now, how do I look in it?"

"You look beautiful and elegant in the extreme."

"I dare say! You really did bring it for *me*, Gerard—for your cousin, whom you tried to improve last year, and used to lecture so often—your plain cousin. You are sure you did not bring it for your ideal, and give it to me on the spur of the moment, because I am your relative, or because you think I have been 'tired,' as you said?"

"I did bring it for my 'realized ideal,' as you are pleased to call her; and she looks even better in it than I could possibly have supposed—her face has a sweeter expression than it ever had before—at least, than it ever had when it looked at me; and as for her eyes—Ah, Polly, why do you turn them away? No, don't look at the fire. Why won't you look at me?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know! Sit down, and let me sit by you for a minute. Ah, Polly, when you were asleep, and I heard of the life you had led lately—the life of hard work and of self-sacrifice, I expected you would wake a grave unbending woman; instead

of which you are almost as childlike as ever. Has God given you your wish? have you had work to do—as much as you possibly could do?"

"Yes."

"Has it been too much for you?"

"Yes."

"Why has it been too much?"

"Because—because—I suppose, because I have had no one to help me."

"Will you undertake a different kind of work now, and let me help you, and ask God to help us both? will you, Margaret?"

Half an hour later the soft foot of Blanch was heard approaching. She had put her baby to bed, and expected to find Margaret alone, for Gerard had said that he could not remain long. Instead of this, she found Gerard alone. He had drawn back the curtain, and was looking out the path of the moon across the water; but when he saw her he approached the fire, and taking the tea-pot from a trivet, poured out for her some tea, and said, "Margaret left me this duty to perform, and another."

"Another," repeated Blanch in her soft calm voice. "Oh, I see, Mr. Grant." She looked earnestly at him, and held out her hand. "Well," she added with more spirit and vivacity, "will you perform the other duty? or shall I take its nature for granted, and congratulate you?"

"Can you sincerely congratulate me?"

"Yes, very sincerely indeed."

"You approve, then?"

"Yes, I fully approve."

"You may congratulate me. If anything could decidedly add to my satisfaction just now, it would be to know that you think Margaret's future not made less bright by being linked with mine."

Blanch soon satisfied him on this point, and

assured him that she would rather see Margaret back again at Thorley, then have the comfort of her society herself. Blanch as usual was quite calm and unexcited ; and though Gerard felt that he should have been glad if she had expressed more affection for Margaret, if she had seemed a little enthusiastic in speaking of her, or if she had appeared excited at the new prospect thus opening out before her friend ; he, notwithstanding, observed that she spoke of herself, her child, and the great trials through which she had passed, with precisely the same reasonable moderation and composure, and he felt that whatever she did say, might be taken at its full value.





CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST QUARREL.

"If ye might have married a king's daughter,
Yoursel ye had to blame,
Ye should have taken the king's daughter,
For ye kenned that I was nane."

HE end of March, but no rough winds and no dust ; there had been rain, and there was sunshine over all the garden at Thorley, when Gerard mounted to the old room in the roof, which Margaret had loved, and opening the casement, leaned out and looked about him.

" If this were not so high above the ground I could declare," he said, " that I smell the primroses, and certainly I can hear the humming of bees among those orange crocuses ; how long will it be, I wonder, before this little fellow comes up ? " Gerard had brought his little brother down with him to Thorley, and that morning had desired that Lewis would shortly come to him, for though he was shy of announcing his new position with regard to Margaret, he felt an irrepressible desire to talk about her, and to no one else could he do so without instantly betraying the state of his feelings towards her. " Yet it must be done," he thought, " and why should I stammer over it ; my

guests are not acquainted with Margaret; why should I mind?" He considered, and acknowledged to himself that Lady Anne, being a friend of old days, would remember how he had indulged sometimes in talk concerning his future wife, as his fancy then drew her and might not see any likeness between her and the hoped-for reality.

Margaret, he thought, is the only woman for me. I think I will tell little Lewis; he at least will be enchanted.

Lewis presently entered with a puppy under each arm, and a serious submissive countenance.

"What have you brought in those little blind gaping things for?" said Gerard with a lordly air.

Upon this the boy blushed deeply, as if detected, for Gerard had vaguely hinted at an intention of examining his school papers and books; and Lewis though in the main he had done his best, was in some fear of his brother's investigations. Gerard's absence had elevated him again in the boy's mind into the grand and irresponsible arbiter of his destiny: accordingly, as if to cheat this destiny into forgetfulness he had brought up the pups as the most beguiling and fascinating things he could lay his hands upon, but when Gerard remarked on the circumstance, and bestowed disrespectful epithets on them, he took it as a rebuke and felt the folly of any attempt of the kind.

"Are they to go down then when I bring up my books?" he asked, yielding at once.

"Your books," repeated Gerard, suddenly remembering his intention, "books—ay, well; yes, you may bring them now."

Lewis retreated, and shortly appeared with several thumbed and dog-eared volumes and papers tucked under his arm, and with a certain air of distress which amused Gerard, but perceiving that this examination was considered to be of

great importance by his little brother, he was too judicious to betray his own absence of mind and the difficulty with which he brought his thoughts down now and then to the pages as he turned them over. Lewis thought him a long time.

"Well, considering that you are only eight and a half," he began.

"Eight and eight months," murmured the honest child.

"Ah, eight and eight months; considering that, I don't know but that I am tolerably well satisfied with you."

Lewis blushed for joy, and when Gerard, sitting down, took him on his knee and kissed his chubby cheeks, he betrayed his relief and pleasure so plainly that Gerard was touched.

"Did you think I should be angry?" he asked, lifting up the child's face and looking into his clear honest eyes.

"Pikey said,"—began Lewis.

"Pikey," repeated Gerard, "Pikey again."

"He didn't say it to me," Lewis replied, as if humbly desirous to explain that he was quite beneath Pikey's direct notice; and he went on to explain how it was reported that Pikey had said to another boy that he wondered Blackbird didn't shake in his shoes when he considered that his brother might come home any day and find out that he had not won a single prize.

"Are you Blackbird?" asked Gerard.

"Yes; because the boys set me up in a high cherry tree once, and I could not get down, and they forgot me a long while, and when they did remember me they asked me what I had been doing all that time, and I said 'singing.'"

"Well, Blackbird, and did you shake in your shoes?"

"I didn't exactly," said Lewis, with infinite

simplicity ; "but when I thought about it, it often made the bread and butter seem to stick in my throat ; at least it did in the winter."

"Why in the winter?"

"Why ; because then I knew that you were ill, and so— ; I thought how shocking it would be if I should never see you again ; and you should think perhaps when you heard I had no prize that I had not tried for one—but I did."

"I'm sure you did, my dear little fellow ; there, don't cry, give me a kiss and don't trouble your head about Pikey, for I think you will never see him again any more."

"Never see Pikey any more. Do you know anything about Pikey then, Gerard?"

"I know nothing about Pikey ; but I know a great deal about you."

"When I am at school," said Lewis, putting his arms round his brother's neck, "I often wonder what they are going to do to me ; but when I am with you it feels so safe. O, I wish I might stop with you always, till I am big enough to go to Rugby."

"Ah," said Gerard, with an air of sage reflection, "I think, you little monkey, that I should not mind having you with me for the next year or two, and teaching you myself, if there was a lady here ; but this house is so dull, that I don't care to live in it without one."

"Then why mayn't there be a lady," exclaimed Lewis, falling into the trap. "O, please, Gerard, let there be a lady. Please do."

"I did not mean a visitor," said Gerard, with some slight embarrassment ; "I meant a lady who would be always here, and be my wife."

"O," said Lewis, opening his round eyes.

"Don't you think it is time I had a wife, eh?" continued Gerard.

"Mrs. Clarke said it was, yesterday," remarked Lewis.

"Indeed," exclaimed Gerard, with sudden interest.

"Yes; I heard her say to Lady Anne, 'You may depend on it, my dear, he will not be single long,—such a catch as he is.' What does a catch mean?"

"O, nothing that you can understand."

"Lady Anne said, 'They'll all set their caps at him; but Gerard, I hope you won't marry a lady in a cap.'

"No; you need not look so serious about it; I promise you that I will not."

"I should like her to have feathers instead, or something grand; and I should like her to have wavy hair, like the Queen's hair that you see on the shillings."

"She shall have wavy hair," said Gerard, smiling.

"And, of course, Gerard, she will be very beautiful."

"Why 'of course?' perhaps I may not wish for a beautiful wife."

"O, but," said Lewis, with a disappointed air, "if she is not beautiful she will not be like that lady in the album."

"The lady in the album?"

"Yes, the album, Margaret's album, with the green and gold cover; she did not take it with her, and there is a picture of such a beautiful lady in it, with long curls, and feathers; O, you never saw such long curls in your life. And when I think about your being married, that is what I pretend your wife is like, and I pretend she has a gown like that, and that she is fond of me, and lets me fish in the long pond."

"It's in the family!" Gerard burst forth as if

speaking to some one who could understand him, "here's another ideal I declare."

"No, it's in Margaret's album," repeated the boy.

"Ah! Margaret's; are you not very anxious to see Margaret?"

"Yes; may she come and visit us when your wife comes?"

"She used to be so good and kind to you."

"Yes; and she made me a cage. I love Margaret. I shall ask her to have a new gown before she comes to see your wife; those she used to wear are not half pretty enough. O, the lady in the album has such a pretty gown."

"But I don't know where to find this lady in the album," observed Gerard; "besides, I think I like Margaret better."

"May you like anyone else better than your wife?" asked Lewis.

"No; therefore I had better not marry that said lady. Don't you think, Lewis, it would be a very good thing for you and me if Margaret would marry me herself?"

"O, that would never do," replied Lewis, shaking his head. "O, dear no; why, Margaret's a girl, nothing but a girl."

"What do you mean, you little goose?" exclaimed Gerard, not half pleased; "a girl! and whom did you expect that I should marry?"

"Why!" exclaimed Lewis, vehement in his desire to expostulate, but at a loss how to express his meaning. "I thought, I thought, somehow I thought that your wife would be like the beautiful ladies in pictures, who are grand and have nothing to do, but Margaret is just like all the people who go about houses every day, she is not a bit prettier."

"To think," murmured Gerard, "that this child should present my own past foolishness to me in

such a ridiculous light! Nothing to do indeed! he makes me blush for my kindred dreams. What, my man, do you really mean to say that you don't admire Margaret?"

How many of us have been asked, "Do you really mean to say you don't admire this picture, or that poem?" and feeling sure that we ought to do, and supposing that we did, have meanly answered accordingly.

Lewis blushed for his detected want of taste, but returned to the attack.

"I would much rather you had married the sort of lady that *I* call beautiful."

"But perhaps that sort of lady would not have married me."

"O yes, I think she would," said Lewis gravely, "for you are a very handsome, beautiful man yourself, Gerard."

"How do you know that?"

"I can see that you are—the boys don't think so though."

"I dare say."

"When they saw your photograph they said, 'What thin cheeks he's got, and what big eyes—Is there any thing to eat in India?'"

"Well, my boy," said Gerard, seeing the hopelessness of further discussion on the subject of beauty, and the desirableness of his intended match, "Well, my boy, I was going to say to you, that supposing I can persuade Margaret to marry me—do you understand? why then I should take you home here to live with me, and I should let you have some new rabbit hutches for yourself, and a pony of your own."

"O, Gerard, thank you."

"Yes, I should indeed, but I could not have you here alone, so if Margaret does not come soon, you must go back to school."

"O, Gerard, but will you ask her to come soon—very soon indeed? And may I go and ask her myself, and take Nero? I am sure Nero would be delighted if she came home again."

"You may, my boy; but, Lewis, you must not say a word to her about what Lady Anne and Mrs. Clarke talked about."

"Why not, Gerard?"

"Because that might make Margaret perhaps less willing to come."

"O then, Gerard, I shall not tell her—of course not."

Two hours after, as Margaret sat alone in a sheltered cove, looking at the grey breakers edged as it were with delicate white lace, she was aware of a little figure flying towards her, followed by a great black dog, and almost before she had made up her mind that it was Lewis, the boy was performing a wild dance round her, till tired and out of breath he came close and nestling by her, exclaimed, while she kissed his chubby cheek, "O, Margaret, O, dear Margaret, do make haste and come home."

The joyous barks of the dog made these words inaudible, but when by the dexterous flinging of a stone Nero had been sent off for some distance, and Lewis had repeated his entreaties, she was so touched by the welcome notion of a return to Thorley being a coming home, that she only looked at Gerard's little brother and repeated his words.

"So Gerard has told you," she said at length, blushing under the earnest eyes of the boy.

"O, yes, of course Gerard told me; and, Margaret—will you come soon?"

"I don't know," said Margaret, taken with a shy fit suddenly.

"Don't know! I would come directly if I were you. O, it will be so jolly! and Gerard says all

the tenants will have a grand dinner, and all the old women will have new gowns. Is that your house?"

"Mine and Mrs. Stewart's."

"It's a very ugly house, I think; not half so nice as Thorley. Margaret—"

"Well, Lewis."

"I am sure Nero will be glad when you come home, for Gerard says he thinks he has not been kindly used; he is very thin."

"Poor Nero!"

"Yes, and Gerard wants you so much, and so do I. What does it matter what Mrs. Clarke said?"

The effect of the first part of this speech was lost in the last.

"Mrs. Clarke," repeated Margaret; "what does she say then?"

"I can't tell you," said Lewis, shaking his head.

"Why not?"

"Because Gerard particularly said I wasn't. Particularly."

Margaret's curiosity was greatly piqued, and a sensitive flush mounted in her cheek. "I never saw Mrs. Clarke in my life," she observed.

"O, no," said Lewis, "and she never heard of you."

"Then," said Margaret, laughing, "I think you must be mistaken, Lewis. Gerard could not have warned you not to repeat her words; not that I wish you to repeat them, mind."

"O yes, he did," persisted Lewis; "why he even said that if you knew perhaps you would not come so soon; I am sure he did; so, of course, I shall not tell you, for I want you to come. Gerard is coming himself directly; he rode over with me, and he had to stop at the mill about something."

A strangely painful sensation made Margaret's hand tremble and her face flush. The dog was

sitting on one side of her, and the boy on the other, when Gerard came up and instantly was aware that Margaret did not meet him in the same mood in which they had parted; but he had put aside his little brother, taken his place, and talked for some time before the least inkling of the cause entered his head.

"Well, you little monkey," he said, turning to Lewis, when, after a good deal of talk about the weather, a pause had ensued which was almost awkward, "I suppose you have duly enlarged on your hopes?"

"O, yes, and I have told Margaret how glad Nero will be," added Lewis; "and I have not told her a word about what Mrs. Clarke said. Now didn't you tell me particularly that I wasn't, Gerard? Margaret won't believe it."

"O!" said Gerard, a light breaking in upon his mind.

Margaret turned her deep eyes upon his face with an inquiring look, Lewis began to prattle to the dog, and a long silence ensued, during which Gerard was lost in perplexing cogitation, and Margaret in doubts that seemed to have no end.

At last she said, "Well, Gerard!"

"Well, Margaret," he answered gravely; and at the same time taking a sudden resolution, he called to Lewis.

"Come here, you little marplot."

"What is a marplot?" demanded Lewis, coming up.

"Perhaps it is a good boy who does as his brother bids him."

"But if it isn't that?" asked the child.

"Oh, pooh! you recollect my telling you not to tell Margaret a word of what Mrs. Clarke said?"

"O yes, of course."

"Then now it is time to tell it; tell every word."

"Every word, Gerard—yes." So crouching on the sand, close in front of the pair, he repeated what he had previously said to his brother, receiving a commendation at the end, and then being ordered off to play with Nero at the edge of the wave.

"Well, Margaret," said Gerard, gently, "has this foolish and particularly derogatory estimate of my character and probable fate dissipated the swarming fancies which had taken possession of your mind."

"Yes."

"And restored you to something like confidence in me?"

"I have shown no want of confidence, Gerard."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed, Gerard; and I do not know what you mean."

"Well, I will forgive all those doubts, fears, and fancies that you have been weighing together in your mind, (and they must have been to my disadvantage;) I forgive them all on condition that you answer me this one question; do you think that if you and I had changed places you could have shown the same confidence in me that I have just shown to you, by making Lewis repeat that conversation?"

Margaret considered—blushed, turned away her head, and answered, "No."

"For you see, I am such a very good match for you, am I not?"

"Yes," sighed Margaret.

"And yet I have dared to let that be stated to you in plain words. I have never been a coward, have I?"

"No."

"People will say you are a lucky woman, only think of that; you know they will beforehand."

"Don't laugh, Gerard."

"Why not?" he asked still more gently than before; "would you rather I sympathized with you? Margaret, you left me no choice, I was obliged to let Lewis speak, my love."

"You treat the matter very lightly; I felt last night, when you were gone,—I feel now—"

"Stop; do not show me that my confidence has been misplaced. Margaret, you cannot expect in this world to have everything that you wish."

"No."

"Nor I either."

"No."

"Laconic!—Well, you have agreed to accept a man who loves you, and who must suit you in some degree, or you could not so happily and delightfully suit and satisfy him. Now if he was broken down in health, and ruined in prospects, and you could take him into that horrid square, bare, bleak house of yours, and work for him and nurse him, he would be perfect; but you must not sigh for perfection! The fellow (sad to say) is sound in mind and limb, and has plenty of money in his purse."

"Well, Gerard, and will you reverse the picture you have painted for me; and will you be more grave?"

"I am so happy, Margaret; why must I be so grave? No, I think you had better paint the picture yourself; but why do you sit nearly with your back to me? how can you be so unsociable?"

"I will reverse the picture, then you propose to marry a woman who—"

"Who loves me?"

"Loves you, and—"

"And never loved any one else. If I have helped you correctly over this part of the picture,

why should I fear what lights or shades you may lay on after? Please go on for yourself?"

"And who looks up to you and thinks it very likely that the character you helped to form should suit yours,—but she is very poor."

"Luckily, she can cure that defect by marrying me."

"And she is not in a good position."

"That also I flatter myself I can do away with. No, Margaret, come to the real disadvantages."

"Well, Gerard, I must add next, that she is very plain."

"Let me look at her. I cannot see her face; there now it turns to me, slowly and half reluctantly. Plain is she? Are you sure, Margaret, that any man ever seriously thought you plain. No; my hoped-for wife is beautiful; she has a fair, modest brow, and glorious lustrous eyes. Ah! she turns away again, and I can see no more. Margaret, what really stands between you and the perfect wife I sigh for is—"

"Is what, Gerard?"

"Ah, now you can turn again, and flatter me with that look, half startled, half afraid, and the colour flushes all over your face. Is your exceeding independence, Miss Grant, and your indomitable pride. Now, the first I hope to do away with—but, O, the second!"

"Am I so proud, Gerard! you make me smile in spite of myself. Well, you have taught me many things; now, perhaps you will teach me humility."

"Yes, say something humble at once to please me."

"Not 'at once,' Gerard, for just now I do feel proud—of you—and your affection for me."

"My apt scholar!"

"Yes, I acknowledge that I am thankful to find

myself the object of your affections. You do not know how very tired I am of my boasted independence,—so tired of it that I shall try to forget what a bad match I am for you, in the pleasure of believing that you will forget it too."

So Margaret went home escorted by Gerard, Lewis, and Nero, to her door. It was a half-holiday, and Blanch being thus able to have the luxury of playing with her baby, brought him down shortly after to Margaret's room, where she found her sitting, lost in thought, and gazing out at the retreating figure moving across the sand towards Thorley.

Blanch came and stood behind her, and put her hand on her shoulders.

Margaret had been shedding tears; she now took the hands of her friend in her own, and kissed them, saying, "Ah, Blanch, I know you must think me very inconsistent."

"No, I do not," said Blanch. "I do not expect you to keep single, dear, that you may be a companion to me, and that you may teach Tom Biliter's child to be a servant."

"But we have often said," proceeded Margaret, "that we should live together."

"Yes, that you might help me, and that we might maintain ourselves by teaching. But now you will not need such a maintenance; and I can get on without help, at least, if you leave me your pupils, for I am quite well now."

"Oh yes; I look to you to go on teaching my pupils."

"So you see," continued Blanch, "it will be to you that I shall still be most indebted for my comfort and maintenance. You will leave everything in good train for me; and when you are married I shall have my two little sisters here and educate them with my pupils; and I shall do very

well without your companionship ; besides, we shall often see each other."

"Yes, very often ; Gerard has promised me that we shall."

"Has he ? Have you talked of me already ?" asked Blanch, her voice faltering for the first time.

"Oh, yes, dearest Blanch ; then you do not think it unkind in me to leave you, though we have made so many plans for remaining together ? and though we have discussed together how we should contrive to pay the rent, and though we have watched your baby's first little smile together, and been very unhappy together, you do not think it unkind ?"

"No, I do not think it unkind."

"And yet," proceeded Margaret, "I did fully intend that we should pass our lives together."

"Yes," said Blanch, rallying her spirits and laughing, "but you did not know that Mr. Grant would ask you to break that resolution."



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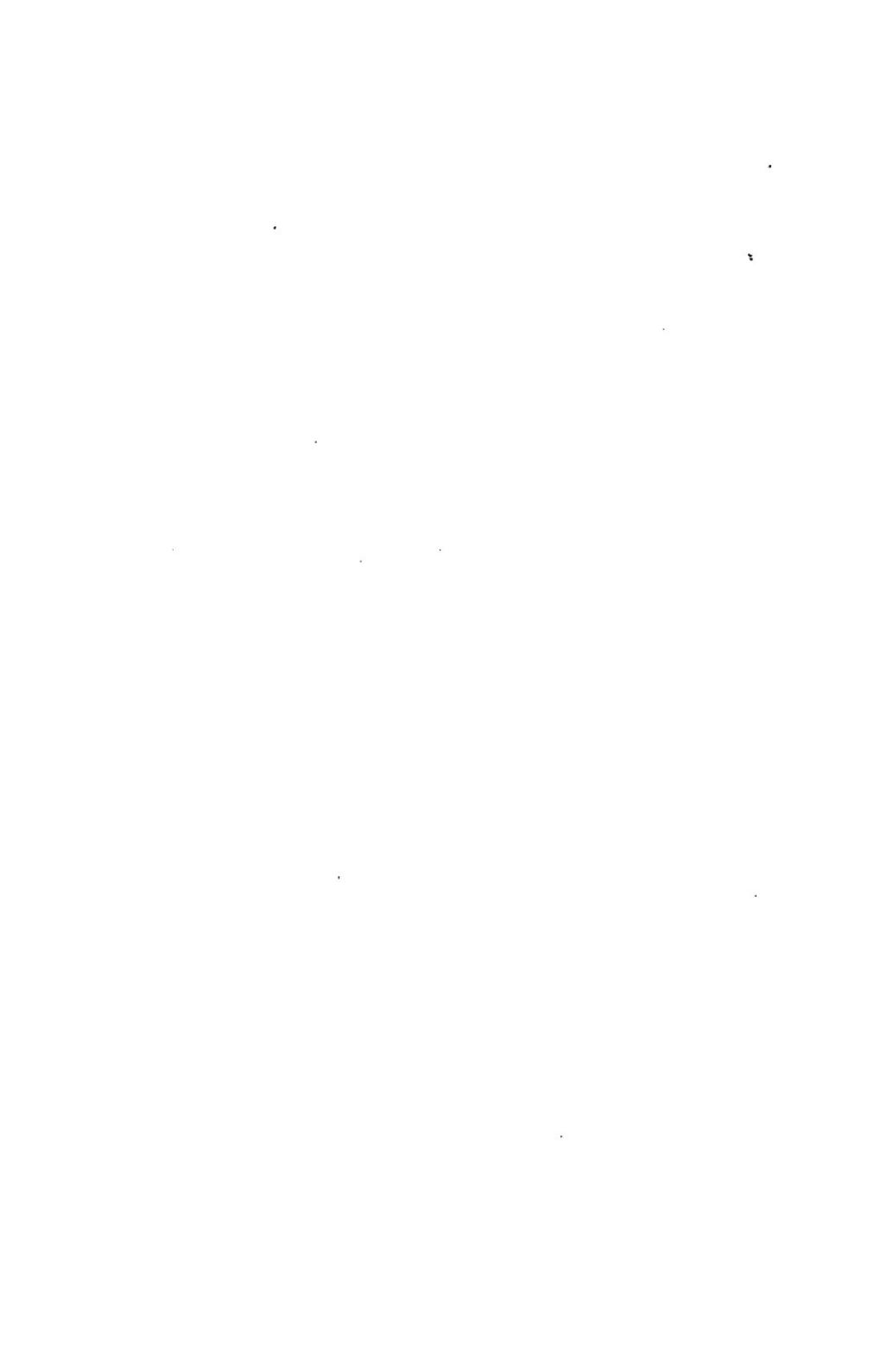
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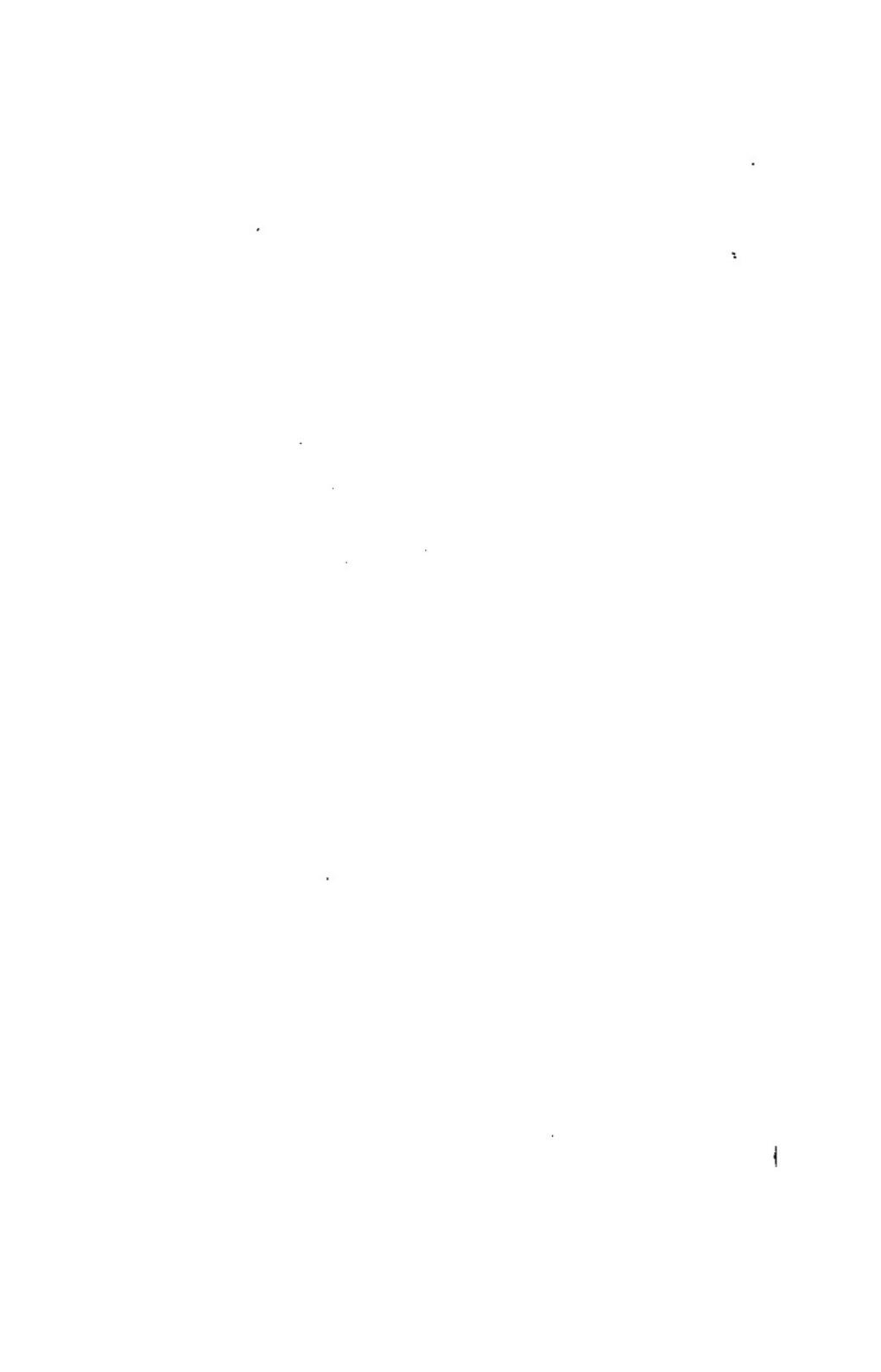
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